



THE VILLAGE AND THE CLASS WAR

Anti-Kulak Campaign in Estonia

Anu Mai Kõll



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ANU MAI KÖLL



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Preface

The study of the collectivisation process in Estonia has led to new discoveries and a new state of the art for me as a traditional agrarian historian. The nature of the Soviet Union under Stalin and, in particular, the atrocities committed in the course of the collectivisation of agriculture have, in last two decades, been the subject of considerable new and productive research and comprise a rapidly developing field. In my capacities as coordinator of the programme on Communist Regimes launched by the Swedish Research Council from 2000 to 2004, and as director of the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) from 2006 to 2012, I have had the privilege not only to read the works, but also to meet and listen to many of the best scholars in this field. Intellectually this has been exciting and rewarding, in spite of the deeply disturbing processes revealed by researchers. The collective and international endeavour to write the history of collectivisation in the Soviet Union before and after the Second World War has been important inspiration for my work, and I am grateful to the many contributors to this burgeoning field of scholarship.

My archival research necessary for writing this book has been supported by the Swedish Research Council. In the SRC programme Communist Regimes Lennart Samuelson, Astrid Hedin and Michael Schoenhals have taught me a great deal. The Baltic Sea Foundation has provided me with shorter research periods for the writing of the final text. It was wonderful to spend short periods at the Aleksanteri Institute in Helsinki, the Herder Institute in Marburg, at the Europe

Center at Stanford and in Tartu, far away from my directorship duties. At CBEES, Irina Sandomirskaja, Maija Runcis and Thomas Lundén have been especially helpful. As always, I bear a debt of gratitude to my long-time mentor, professor emeritus Aleksander Loit.

In Estonia, archive and library personnel have been most forthcoming and supportive. In particular the staff of the Viljandi County Archive (VilMA), now disappeared and integrated into other units, was invaluable. Archive director Jaak Valge gave me free access. Archivist Tiit Lühik literally opened the archive for me. Having long worked there, in both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, she knew all the materials, and several times indicated documents that I otherwise would have overlooked. I will never forget how she went on looking for signs of “kulak quotas” when I had already tired. (Later, it turned out that these were not given to the local authorities in the 1940s.) The Estonian National Archive in Tallinn (ERA) and the special collection of the Communist Party Archives (ERAF)—now both part of the State Archive (*Rahvusarhiiv*)—also provided good service. The illustrations are courtesy of the Estonian Film Archive. Estonian colleagues have provided help and stimulating discussions; among them I would like to mention in particular Aigi Rahi-Tamm and Olaf Mertelsmann, both of Tartu University.

The manuscript has benefited from the comments of participants in various seminars and conferences where I have presented early versions and chapters. The friendly atmosphere of CBEES’s Advanced Seminar provided everyday encouragement; the graduate students in particular have been keen and curious readers. I also have had the privilege of presenting preliminary texts at conferences and invited lectures in Estonia, Sweden, Germany, Latvia and the United States. Olavi Arens, Amir Weiner and Peter Haslinger, among many others, have given important comments.

The final text has been thoroughly read and commented on by David Feest, who also has generously shared with me insights into parallels between the Estonian and the Russian anti-kulak campaign. Bradley Woodworth has corrected my English and with his questions has helped me clarify a number of passages. I have been very fortunate to have such enthusiastic and knowledgeable final readers! Any errors or misjudgments that remain in spite of this wide support are my own responsibility.

ANU MAI KÕLL

Chapter 1

The Land Question in Estonia

Estonia is situated on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Baltic German barons have dominated most of its history as rulers of the indigenous enserfed peasantry from the time of the eastern crusades in the twelfth century on. Until the late nineteenth century, local rule was feudal in character; this did not end completely until the aristocracy finally lost power through national independence and democratisation in 1919. The feudal estates as the nuclei of society belonged to differing empires and states through the political turbulence of both the medieval and modern eras. The multiethnic Russian empire was most persistent, holding state power for two hundred years until the February revolution of 1917. At this point, nationalist forces saw the possibility of breaking away from Russia, in the general context of civil war. When independence was achieved in 1919, the former Russian provinces were organised along ethnic lines, dividing ethnic Estonians from their Latvian neighbours to the south. Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians enjoyed twenty years of national independence in the interwar period before the beginning of the Second World War when their fate was sealed through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the treaty of non-aggression signed between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In the secret part of this treaty, the Baltic States, along with eastern Poland, were included in the Soviet sphere of influence. Following the agreement, the Soviet Union demanded bases on the territory of both Estonia and Latvia. (Lithuania was initially assigned

to the German sphere but was later transferred to the Soviets.) Seeing no alternative, the Baltic states acceded to Soviet demands.¹

1.1. Agriculture and the First Soviet Year 1940–41

Soviet troops entered Estonia in October 1939 and kept to their bases for almost a year. In June 1940, demands for a more friendly government were issued from Moscow. A *coup d'état* against the moderate authoritarian right-wing government in power was staged with the help of Red Army soldiers. President Konstantin Päts was forced to resign and was arrested a week later. In his place a puppet government was installed, consisting of left-wing intellectuals rather than die-hard communists, which co-operated with Soviet Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov, who remained behind the scenes. This new government organised rigged elections, resulting in a Chamber of Deputies of pro-communist candidates only, which immediately applied to become a member republic of the Soviet Union. The annexation was thus carried out according to a peculiarly legalistic procedure. This deceived few observers, particularly as the same procedure took place simultaneously in Latvia and Lithuania.²

Sovietisation in the area was sudden and thorough: the new Soviet republics had the legislation and organisation of the Soviet Union imposed on them; the armies of the Baltic states were incorporated into the Red Army and the police and civil administration were purged. In the economy, nationalisation began almost immediately as large industrial enterprises and banks were seized often by employees at lower levels with a communist commissar at their side.³

In the agricultural sector, sovietisation occurred in an egalitarian and peasant-dominated society. The Estonian peasantry made up about 60 per cent of the population at the time of the First World War. In the late nineteenth century, some were able to buy land while others

¹ See Ilmjärv, *Silent Submission*, 464–77.

² Find a general history of Estonia in English in Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*. For an account of the 1939–1940 crisis, see 139–46.

³ Exiled Estonians have given accounts of their experiences in *Eesti riik ja rahvas teises maailmasõjas* I–X.

received land in the thorough national land reform of 1919–1925.⁴ In this land reform, the aristocracy, which were mostly Baltic Germans, lost all their land except for 50 hectares per family, ending the long-standing estate system in the area. The result of these processes was that a system of middle-sized family farms arose in Estonia, with an exceptionally egalitarian land distribution. Estonia's land distribution is compared to traditionally egalitarian societies in the region in Graph 1 (page 29). The economic differentiation within the Estonian peasantry was smaller than in neighbouring Finland and Sweden. Still, a difference persisted in the interwar period between the so-called “old farms” purchased in the nineteenth century, which were somewhat larger, and settler farms resulting from the land reform. There were even two peasant political parties which voiced the interests of these two groups. On the eve of the Second World War farms were almost universally worked by their owners, except for the occasional farm owned by an elderly or ill farmer. The interwar independence period did not entail a process of social differentiation.⁵

In the process of sovietisation in 1940, land was immediately nationalised. Above all, farmers feared collectivisation, but the new local political leadership assured them that no such plans existed. Instead, a new land reform would be announced in which the remaining poor peasants and farmhands would be given land. This land was to be taken from wealthy peasants and schools, churches and other institutional owners. Land reform legislation was introduced in late autumn 1940. Land exceeding 30 hectares per farm was expropriated without compensation and added to the state land reserve. From this reserve, poor peasants, landless labourers and soldiers could apply for land.⁶ Simultaneously, farm implements, cattle and seeds were to be expropriated from the larger farms, in proportion to the land seized from them. Land reform is a considerable undertaking and normally takes years to carry through. Implementation of this land reform was hurried, careless, and still underway when the German army attacked

⁴ For an account of the peasant land reform, see Kõll, *Peasants on the World Market*.

⁵ Kõll, *Peasants on the World Market*, 119.

⁶ Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 38; Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 152.

the Soviet Union in June 1941. Had it been completed, land distribution, already egalitarian, would have been made even more equal. However, such a result would have likely made farms less viable, as the new units tended to be very small.

Formally, agricultural transition in the new republics of the Soviet Union in 1940 resembled the terms of the worker-peasant agreement in the Russian civil war of 1917–1921, in which the Bolsheviks tried to win the support of a part of the peasantry. At that point, the Bolsheviks refrained from collectivisation—an aim which overall they considered desirable—just as the Soviet leadership in the Baltic republics did later. Instead they adopted parts of the agrarian programme of the Socialist Revolutionaries, an approach they maintained until the Stalin Revolution in 1929.⁷ The Soviet land reforms began in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in late 1940 and early 1941, and can be interpreted as an attempt, inspired by the earlier Soviet model, to form a worker-peasant union in order to win the confidence of the peasantry.

The situation in Estonia in 1940 was different, however, from that in Russia in 1917, given the system of land distribution and commercialisation of farming that had taken place in the interwar years. There was also a significant difference in political consciousness. Estonian farmers were educated, modestly successful in the difficult market conditions of the 1920s and 1930s, well organised, confident and cohesive. As their organisations had kept track of the collectivisation process in the Soviet Union from a distance during the interwar years they had grown increasingly anti-communist in orientation.⁸ In this Estonian peasants resembled other parts of the international agrarian movement. The prospects of winning them over for the Soviet cause were not particularly bright, as anyone familiar with the situation could have seen. However, the Soviet leaders did not pay much attention to local peculiarities. The same policy was indiscriminately carried through in all new areas gained in the Second World War, and the pattern seems to have been borrowed from Soviet Russia, with some minor adjustments.

While the new Soviet government was hastening through large-scale administrative reforms in the Baltic region, international ten-

⁷ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 2–3; Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, 32–33.

⁸ Köll, *Peasants on the World Market*, 111–12.

sions were rapidly growing. Anticipating an attack from Nazi Germany, Soviet leaders proceeded to secure the border areas. The Soviet rulers had treated Baltic elites with contempt through propaganda and expropriations in the previous year, and did not expect the elite to be loyal to their new rulers. A week before the onslaught of Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in late June 1941, leading members of Estonian society and their families were deported to Siberia. This included not only political elites and military officers, but also employers, leaders of labour unions, policemen, cultural figures and other pillars of society.⁹ The deportation was large in scale; according to recent estimates, approximately 10,000 persons were deported, which amounted to almost one per cent of the total population of the country.¹⁰ This sent a shock wave through the population, as practically every family knew victims. The deportation, rather than economic losses or political dissent, was the likely reason for Estonian collaboration with the Nazis in the first period of German occupation. The resistance and resentment that met the Red Army when it returned to Estonia at the end of the war was also conditioned by this first instance of mass violence.

Representatives of the communist regime were evacuated before the German offensive. A few battles took place in Estonia as the Soviet authorities and troops were evacuated. The prisons were also emptied, and political prisoners were executed. These were the first executions in Estonia, for in the earlier stages of the sovietisation process detainees had been sent to Soviet Russia to be executed.¹¹ The names of local communists were to a considerable extent Estonian, according to detailed accounts of this change in occupation armies.¹²

In the interstice between the departure of the Soviet army and the arrival of the Germans, the Home Guard (*Kaitseliit*) organisation from the period of independence attacked retreating communist destruction battalions, formed to fight in the rear. According to local historical works, the Home Guard made contact with the *Wehrmacht* as they were

⁹ Ant, *Eesti 1939–41*, 167–70.

¹⁰ Rahi-Tamm, "Human losses," 27.

¹¹ Laar, Tross, *Punane terror* [Red terror], 7.

¹² Lindmäe, *Suvesõda Viljandimaal 1941* [Summer War in Viljandi County], 50–80.

marching in, and in Viljandi County it helped to capture local representatives of Soviet power to clean up behind the lines.¹³ Small-scale guerrilla operations against the Soviet regime also took place in this power vacuum, although many of the acts of resistance were unarmed.

1.2. Nazi Occupation 1941–1944

The years of German occupation significantly affected the eventual post-war sovietization of the Baltic countries, a process that had parallels in other newly acquired areas of the Soviet Union. As victors in the war, the Soviet authorities chose to exact retribution for all signs of collaboration with the Nazi occupation forces during the war. The interpretation of collaboration was extremely wide. It did not matter whether an Estonian joined the Waffen SS or other German organisations voluntarily, or had been forcibly mobilised. The German occupation must be discussed at some length here as events that occurred in its course were of central importance to repressions after the war.

Some in Estonia greeted the arriving German army as liberators from Soviet repression. Meanwhile, the Red Army with its new Estonian recruits had evacuated to the interior of Soviet Russia, along with officials of Soviet Estonia and Communist Party members. Some industries and their work force were evacuated as well. Moreover, the small Jewish population, numbering approximately 5,000, also chose to leave for the Soviet Union, out of fear of the Nazis. Most of the approximately 1,000 Jews who remained did so only because their movements were hindered by age or illness. The total number of evacuees has been estimated at 25,000.¹⁴

For many of those greeting the entering Nazi troops, there were disillusionments to follow. The Baltic area was ruled by the German military until December 1941, when the *Ostministerium* and *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, which governed the three Baltic States and Belarus, took over responsibility. Formally, these occupied territories had the same status as other parts of the Soviet Union occupied by the

¹³ Lindmäe, *Suvesõda Viljandimaal 1941*, 289.

¹⁴ Rahi-Tamm, "Human losses," 38.

Germans.¹⁵ This indicates that the Germans' long-term plan was to incorporate them as part of greater Germany; political and economic administration was constructed with an eye to this. The German authorities formally set up a native self-government, a puppet government consisting of sympathisers of Estonian origin. However, this self-administration had a very limited scope of action; institutions of the German civil administration worked in parallel, even at the local level, and increasingly took over the more important functions.

Undoubtedly there were reasons of war to account for close oversight by the German administration, but there were also racial considerations: the Estonians were regarded as inferior people, suited primarily for agricultural labor.¹⁶ An official in the *Ostministerium* wrote: "*Die vorhandenen Einheimischen sind für einen Einsatz in gehobene wirtschaftliche Positionen teils nicht geeignet, teils nicht erwünscht.*"¹⁷ The memorandum shows the general German attitude towards the populations in *Ostland*. Local variations existed, however. For instance, the governor for Estonia in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, Karl-Siegmund Litzmann, seems to have been slightly more positively disposed toward the Estonians than official policy directed.

Industries, banks and mines that had been nationalised under the Soviet government were reorganised into trustee holding companies; large German companies supplied the executive management. The long-term plans of the Nazis, described in documents recovered after the war, were to resettle the Baltic peoples eastward on the Belarusian borderlands. The area was to be used for settlement by German peasants, and the Nordic peoples under Nazi rule were invited to participate in this new colonisation of the Baltic area.¹⁸

Agricultural production in the conquered areas was to be used to support the German war effort. In order to control production and deliveries, the nationalised land was not given back to former owners; to their great disappointment, former owners were still leaseholders

¹⁵ Myllyniemi, *Die Neuordnung der Baltischen Länder 1941–1944*, 87.

¹⁶ Myllyniemi, *Die Neuordnung der Baltischen Länder 1941–1944*, 102.

¹⁷ "The natives at hand are not suited for higher positions in the economy, nor are they particularly desired." PM in *Ostministerium*, BA:R6/23, quoted in Myllyniemi, *Die Neuordnung der Baltischen Länder 1941–1944*, 169.

¹⁸ Myllyniemi, *Die Neuordnung der Baltischen Länder 1941–1944*, 169–70.

under the state. The Nazi administration, however, reversed the Soviet land reform to the extent that farmers could use the entire land they had formerly owned for cultivation. They encouraged peasants whose land had been recently reduced to take it back from the settlers to whom it had been reassigned under Soviet rule. In the last year of German occupation the situation began to change somewhat. When the German forces began experiencing serious setbacks on the Russian front in 1943–44, it became necessary to showcase privatisations in order to win the co-operation of Baltic peasants.¹⁹

Local Estonians were recruited to the auxiliary police forces and to the German-organized *Omakaitse* (Home Guard). Recent detailed studies of this period have shown that these units participated in the Holocaust and atrocities committed against Jews, communists, Roma (gypsies) and prisoners of war, although there still is debate concerning this.²⁰ Estonians were also recruited into the German army, but the calls for enlistment were to a large extent avoided in the first years of occupation. Many young men chose to hide in the woods rather than to go to the front in Soviet Russia. As the Soviet army drew closer, the situation changed. The approaching Soviet forces made it clear that they regarded Estonia as Soviet territory that ought to be liberated in order for the earlier Soviet regime to be restored. At this point, nationalist politicians regarded a renewed Soviet occupation as the worst possible scenario, and in February 1944 called on Estonian young men to join the fight against the Soviets on the side of the Germans. Many did so, becoming members of the National Legion of the Waffen-SS.²¹ This controversial move should be understood in light of the fact that the Nazis were losing the war, combined with a vain hope that the forward march of the Red Army could be contained long enough for the Estonians to be rescued by the western allies. In late 1943, a

¹⁹ Myllyniemi, *Die Neuordnung der Baltischen Länder 1941–1944*, 223–25

²⁰ Historical commissions in all three Baltic countries have initiated research and issued reports on the period of German occupation. See *Estonia 1940–45, Reports of the Estonian International Commission*, 639–766. For fresh and extensive new research see also Gaunt, Levine and Palosuo, *Collaboration and resistance during the Holocaust*.

²¹ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 163; Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 55–58.

number of Estonian young men chose to go to Finland to fight the Soviets.²² Some thought of this as a possibility to fight the Soviets in the uniform of the Finnish army, considered to be morally decent as compared to that of the *Wehrmacht*.

Along with the Jews killed in the Holocaust, a large number of Estonians suspected of communist sympathies were also victims of the Nazi regime. A still larger number of casualties, according to the official Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity, consisted of prisoners of war from the Red Army.²³ These were detained in POW camps run by the Germans, where they led a miserable existence. Many prisoners were leased out for farm work on ordinary Estonian farms, as the labour shortage increased due to, on the one hand, the military drafts by both occupation powers, and on the other, the drafts of forced labour to German industries. Many prisoners of war perished in the camps as a result of the bad conditions, and many were executed when the Germans were driven out of Estonia in the summer of 1944.

Large-scale battles were fought as the Red Army advanced into Estonia in early 1944. The German army did not fall back immediately. While the fighting continued, in early autumn 1944, about 70,000 Estonians chose to escape abroad. Most of them fled to Germany, in the wake of the retreating Nazi administration and army. Another substantial group of refugees, some 25,000, fled to Sweden. The advancing front made flight difficult for many living in the inland parts of the country; those in the coastal areas had better opportunities to get away. The German troops managed to keep a stronghold in the farthest peninsula of the island Saaremaa until the end of November, and part of the neighbouring Courland coast remained in German hands until the end of the war. Trickle of refugees were still escaping from these areas.²⁴

²² Kõresaar, *Soldiers of Memory*, 2, 245; Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 58, the figure given is 6,000. See also Rahi-Tamm, "Human losses," 38.

²³ 15,000 is the latest estimation, in Maripuu, "Soviet Prisoners of War in Estonia in 1941–44," 766.

²⁴ Raag, "Eestlaste põgenemine Rootsi..." [Estonian flight to Sweden in the second world war], 55–63.

1.3. Estonians Living in the Soviet Union

Estonian recruits in the Red Army had a difficult fate during the war. To begin with, they were sent to kolkhozes and industries throughout the country that were short of labour. Soldiers were largely dispatched to labour battalions. Even though they shared the fate of local Russians, conditions were extremely hard. Survivors of these labour battalions reported that they often were near starvation, and that conditions were not that different from the Gulag, so those who had believed in a better life in the Soviet Union had been deceived.²⁵ Finally, by 1942 they were assembled into national units; these were deployed on the Western front, where a primary goal was to come to the rescue of Leningrad. At the same time, some units went towards Estonia. Memoirs of these soldiers tell how they were encouraged to press on by the message, conveyed by their officers, that they were on their way home.²⁶ They sometimes were even engaged in battles with other Estonian soldiers fighting in German uniform. It is usually believed that a large number of desertions took place in such situations, but naturally there are no official figures.

Most of the Estonians who had withdrawn to Soviet territory during the war were drawn into and used for a renewed effort to reconstruct a Soviet society in Estonia.²⁷ Coming back to Estonia, they were supplemented with Estonians whose families had migrated to Russia before the First World War. In Estonia these emigrants, who for the most part had assimilated to Russian language and culture, were sometimes derogatively called “Yestonians” (Est. *jeestlased*), reflecting the difficulty they had in pronouncing the word “Estonian” due to their Russian accent.²⁸

²⁵ *Eesti elulood* I, 134; Kõresaar, *Soldiers of Memory*, 10–11; *Velikije Luki, Tehumardi, Kuramaa*, 113–14.

²⁶ Kõresaar, *Soldiers of Memory*, 11, 284; Noormets, Ojalo. *Korpusepoisid...* [*The lads of the Estonian corps*], 103–106; *Velikije Luki, Tehumardi, Kuramaa*, 14.

²⁷ Kõresaar, *Soldiers of Memory*, 288; Rahi-Tamm, “Human losses,” 39, Table 2.

²⁸ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 57–58; Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 76.

The local Communist Party leadership had been evacuated, but as the Red Army advanced through former Soviet territory, they sat down to plan for their return. A group of 20–30 people, called an “operative group,” had been assigned for each administrative county (Est. *maakond*—the system of *oblasti* and *raiony* was not introduced in the Baltic republics until 1950). They divided among themselves tasks in the local Communist Party and the local administration and discussed future policies.²⁹ Still, there were not enough communists for a full-scale administration. Physical hardship and the war had reduced their numbers inside the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, the Nazi regime had targeted communist sympathisers remaining in Estonia. The *Omakaitse* and auxiliary police were skilful in finding them, so many were killed and others arrested and placed in detention camps. It was, moreover, characteristic of the suspiciousness of the Stalinist Soviet regime that Communist Party members and allies who had survived under Nazi rule were not regarded as reliable. It seems as if the only way to show allegiance would have been to die for the Soviet Union. American historian Amir Weiner has noticed the same phenomenon in the reconstruction process in Nazi-occupied Ukraine.³⁰

1.4. Reconstruction of Soviet Estonia

As each area of Estonia was retaken by the Red Army, a small group of people took charge of the administration according to plan. Still, there was a great need for cadres. The party system was built from above, but to begin with there were few local, or basic organisations. In Viljandi County, for instance, there was already a Party bureau in October 1944, but it took another three months before the first party meeting was held.³¹ The Communist Party had an almost adequate organisa-

²⁹ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine eestis 1940–1950* [Sovietisation of local administration in Estonia 1940–1950], 92–100; Estonian State Archives, the Communist Party Archive ERAF F. 19 Op. 3 Vol. 23 and F. 811 Op.1 Vol. 7 in the case of Viljandi County; Laasi, *Eesti NSV tahumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise ettevalmistus*, 10.

³⁰ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 160–62.

³¹ ERAF F. 19, Op. 3, Vol. 1.

tion on the county level, but at the level of township (Est. *vald*) there was often only one party representative, the party organiser.³² Basic organisations on the township level were not formed until late in 1946 and 1947.³³ The local government consisted of Executive Committees on the county and township levels, with a chairman, a secretary and members of tax committees, land committees, and other specialised committees. Chairmen, secretaries and local party secretaries were screened and appointed by the cadre system of the Communist Party, in the prevailing *nomenklatura* system this was the lowest level in the hierarchy.³⁴ Not until 1948 did the regular, rigged elections of the soviets proper (Rus. *sovety*)—the councils—take place in the townships. Below this level, village soviets were formed in the summer of 1945, with half a dozen members in each. The lowest level consisted of village deputies (Est. *külavolinikud*), persons charged with distribution of information and surveillance of about twenty households. This person wore a badge, carried information to households and was responsible for their fulfilment of labour duties and forced deliveries of agricultural products to the state. In return, he or she was liberated from labour duties in lumbering and had sometimes privileged access to consumer goods distributed through special channels. The village deputies were elected at meetings for a period of one year.³⁵

There was obviously a shortage of personnel to fulfil all these tasks. The number of communist sympathisers had been reduced in the first year of communist rule, and again under German occupation. Soviet-era historians—Ants Ruusman for instance—have emphasised the weakness of the party in rural areas during the years of collectivisation.³⁶ Ruusman also discussed weaknesses at the lowest level of local government.³⁷

³² Kivimaa, "Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine 1947–1950," 70.

³³ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine*, 131.

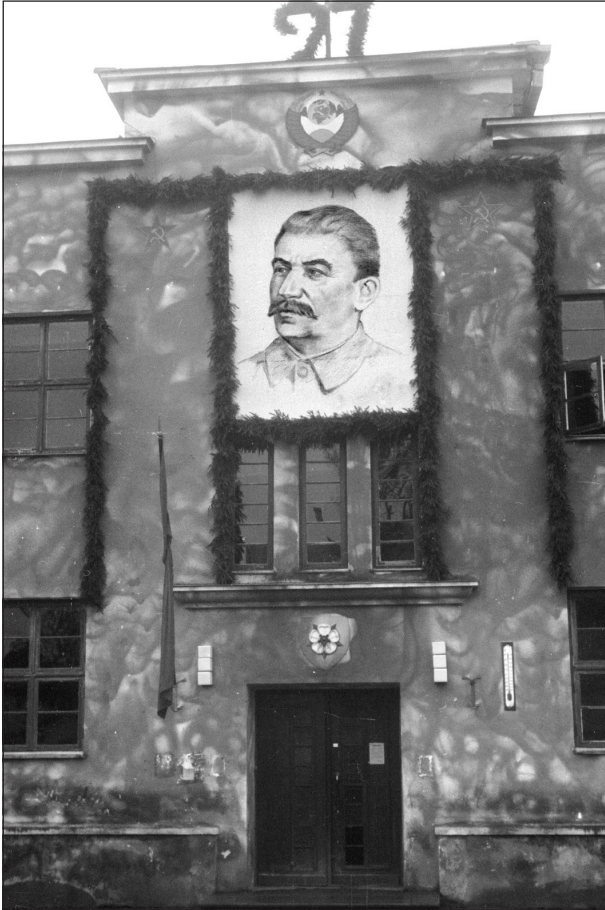
³⁴ Standard procedure, see Tarvel (ed.), *Eestimaa kommunistliku partei* [Central Committee of the ECP], 105; see also Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet rule*, 99; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 298; Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 146–57.

³⁵ Feest, "Mait Metsanurga kiri..." [Letter to E. Päll], 86; Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 115–117; VilMA F. 124, Op. 1, Vol. 2, 4.

³⁶ Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine..." [Recovery and collectivisation of agriculture in Estonian SSR 1944–1950], 326.

³⁷ "Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine..." 337–338.

A central recommendation was to find people who had been suffering under the Germans.³⁸ Some local administrators were allowed to stay at their posts from one regime to the other, but these were turbulent years, and many administrators lost their jobs within the first year.³⁹



*The image of Stalin hanging on the town hall of Viljandi in 1944.
From the Estonian Film Archive.*

³⁸ Laasi, "Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...", 10–12; Kivimaa, "Eest NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine 1947–1950," 70.

³⁹ Laasi, "Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...", 10; Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine...", 337–39.

In the years following the end of war, former Red Army soldiers of Estonian origin were gradually demobilised. In the demobilisation camps, some of them were instructed in the administrative work of Soviet officials. Subsequently they were dispatched to townships all over the country to take office as chairmen of Executive Committees. They had several advantages over other local inhabitants, from the point of view of the new rulers. They had not been in contact with Nazis and could not have collaborated with them. Moreover, they had already been socialised in the Soviet system for four to five years. And finally, they belonged to the most prestigious of all Soviet institutions, the victorious Red Army, which gave them an added air of reliability.

The local government and party system consisted mostly of Estonians; at higher levels, though, the Communist Party secretaries had counterparts, second secretaries, from Russia and other Union republics who doubled them in office.⁴⁰ They received their orders from the Estonian bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.⁴¹ There are indications that the security forces in Estonia in these first years consisted mostly of non-indigenous cadres. "Destruction battalions" created on the township level from the end of 1945, consisting of Communists and Komsomol members, aided them.⁴² The security forces of the People's Commissariat of the Interior NKGB (Estonian *Siseasjade Rahvakomissariaat* SARK) had two main tasks. One was to fight the armed guerrillas who lived in the forest—the so-called "forest brothers" who were rather active in the first years—and to screen the population for collaborators with the Nazis.

The screening of the population was large-scale and intended to reach every grown-up person. Normally, suspected individuals were examined by a three-person panel consisting of the local party secretary, the chairman of the Executive Committee, and the leader of the local NKGB organisation. Those who had collaborated with the Nazis were labelled "enemies of the people" and were normally arrested. Their families were also considered enemies of the people and stigmatised, the children had difficulties getting higher education. Those in

⁴⁰ Tarvel, (ed.), *Eestimaa kommunistliku partei*, 42.

⁴¹ Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 75.

⁴² Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine...", 113.

the countryside had their farmsteads reduced to seven hectares (often this involved forced relocation to less valuable cultivated land), and their herds to one cow.⁴³ This period has only lately been described in detail. The number of casualties and arrested in this screening process has not yet been definitively determined, but is estimated to be 19,000, of whom many died in the first two years of detention.⁴⁴

The other task of the NKGB—fighting the guerrillas, or the forest brothers—was most intense during the first two years after the end of the war. Some of those in the underground were merely hiding; others undertook raids against Soviet and party officials. A popular target was the requisition officer in charge of foodstuff collection.⁴⁵ The Soviet regime took a carrot and stick approach toward the forest brothers: large numbers of security forces were deployed against them, while those who surrendered were offered amnesty. This policy was effective at first, but as those who turned themselves in were detained again later on new charges, the Soviets lost credibility.⁴⁶ The forest brothers made a last effort for large-scale resistance in connection with the deportations in 1949, but their numbers were by then small. In 1950, new efforts were made to destroy the forest brothers, and the movement faded away over the next few years.⁴⁷

1.5. Land reform 1944–45

As soon as the Red Army had conquered the major part of Estonia, in autumn 1944, the land reform process, begun in autumn 1940 and reversed to some extent during German occupation, was launched again. The purpose was to enforce the land seizures of the earlier Soviet period and to finish the reform, in addition to considering some

⁴³ According to decree nr 380; Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 53; Ruusman, “Põllumajanduse taastamine...,” 343.

⁴⁴ Saueaak, “Nõukogude julgeoleku organid...” [Soviet security organs in Estonia 1944–1953], 83–87; Rahi-Tamm, “Human losses,” 31.

⁴⁵ Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 86.

⁴⁶ Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 89; Ruusman, “Põllumajanduse taastamine...,” 117.

⁴⁷ Laar “1949. Aasta märtsiküüditamine...” [March deportations of 1949], 65, 72–73.

new aspects of punishment of war behaviour. Families of those fighting in the Red Army who had been killed or maimed in the war were entitled to receive land.⁴⁸ The armed resistance against Soviet power went on after the war had ended, so families in which one member was suspected of having joined the forest brothers, or of helping them or others involved in the nationalist resistance were also considered “enemies of the people” and saw their farms reduced to 5–7 hectares.⁴⁹

The land reform was based on the assumption that there were considerable class contradictions in rural society. The motive, as assessed by Soviet-era historians, was to isolate the wealthy peasants and make the landless, poor and middle peasants the allies of Soviet power.⁵⁰ It was consciously constructed as a zero-sum game, with losers and winners. According to the design of the land reform, a settler family had to live next to the expropriated family on its former land. If the entire program were carried out, the settler would, moreover, till the land with the very draught animals, implements and seeds taken from his neighbour. Clearly, this form of redistribution was designed to foster animosity between Estonians. It was expressly intended to increase sympathies of the landless and the poor peasantry towards the communist regime, and to show them who their foes were, namely the wealthier peasants.⁵¹

The original plan was for the land reform to be finished by December 15, 1944.⁵² Members of the Komsomol, or Communist youth organization were sent to the countryside—20–30 for each county—to help carry through the reform.⁵³ It would soon become clear that the plan was unrealistic. Most of the land reform was actually carried through during the following year, in 1945. Implementation was so hasty and indiscriminate that the regime almost imme-

⁴⁸ Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 38–40: Ruusman, “Põllumajanduse taastamine...,” 343.

⁴⁹ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine* [The March deportations of 1949 in Tartu town and county], 25–26; Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 119–121.

⁵⁰ Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 19.

⁵¹ Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 40, 46–49.

⁵² Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 123–124.

⁵³ Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 38–40. There were, however, few traces of these “helpers” in local sources.

diately had to begin a revision of all the inconsistencies and wrong decisions. This revision began with an article by first party secretary Nikolai Karotamm in the newspaper for the countryside, *Talurahvaleht*, in June 1946. The rectification campaign, in which people were to write to the land commissions or the party officials about faults committed in the land reform, began at once and went on well into 1947.⁵⁴ This sequence of events hardly increased the prestige of the Communist Party.

The conflict-provoking design of the land reform would suggest that the reaction would be that local animosities were increasing and the mood would be bad in the countryside. During these years, the Soviet formula for administration of the countryside was that of “sharpening class struggles.” Not even Soviet-era historians tried to convince their readers that there was any proof that poor peasants actually benefitted from the land reform. On the contrary, a second aim of the land reform (as these historians have pointed out) was to teach the poor peasantry that individual farms did not solve their problems, and that they would be better off joining collective farms.⁵⁵

What emerges clearly from the documents is that this was a period of insecurity. The settlers had little possibility of actually farming since they lacked houses close to their new land, and often had no draught animals or agricultural implements. Settlers had to participate in forced deliveries of agricultural products and obligatory lumbering, so for them the acquisition of land was not necessarily positive on balance. Everybody waited for the next step from the government or more directly from the CPSU Central Committee. A sympathiser, Eduard Päll, wrote to the third Secretary of the Communist Party in charge of propaganda in Estonia describing how people in Tartu County perceived the situation in the summer of 1946. A feeling of instability was dominant among the peasants with whom the writer had spoken—they felt there was no point in keeping more animals, no point in planning for the future. Agricultural taxes were rapidly increasing, and no one wanted to guess where they would stop.⁵⁶ The letter goes on:

⁵⁴ Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 74.

⁵⁵ Ruusman, “Põllumajanduse taastamine...,” 343.

⁵⁶ Feest, “Mait Metsanurga kiri...,” 83–85.

Class differences were not obvious in the countryside before the great upheaval; they were shaded over by kinship and friendship. And now we can hear regrets expressed about many deported or imprisoned large farmers—even from poor peasants! Very few of them are considered to have earned their punishment, like it or not! Exploitation in the past has been forgotten.⁵⁷

In the Leninist terminology employed by Soviet-era historians, the land reform was called the first step in the Sovietisation of the Estonian countryside—“the isolation of the kulaks.”⁵⁸

1.6. The Anti-kulak Campaign, 1947–49

The next step in the Sovietisation of the countryside was taken in the realm of taxes. A process called the “squeezing out the kulaks from the villages” was engaged with the help of heavy special taxes. The formal procedure was to single out kulak families which had to pay a special tax, handled by the local tax committee, who also took charge of the tax collection. Agricultural taxes were suddenly doubled in August 1947, and those who were singled out as kulaks were taxed separately, with a 50 per cent addition on top of the regular taxes.⁵⁹

Local administrative officials—the Executive Committees at the county and township levels—were made responsible for the tax campaign. According to the decree, the local Soviet government officials together with so-called activists were to make lists of kulak households in their village or township. Just who was an “activist” was ambiguous; the category could include party members, poor peasants and village

⁵⁷ Feest, “Mait Metsanurga kiri...,” 86.

⁵⁸ The term *kulak*, literally “fist” in Russian, referred to better-off peasants, a parallel to the urban bourgeoisie. In this text, the concept will simply mean the people called kulak in Stalinist Soviet Union. In the campaigns of 1929–32 and 1947–49 they were called the exploiters of the countryside. The connotation has been deliberately fuzzy and shifted over time; see Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 23–24; Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 345–51.

⁵⁹ Taagepera, “Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Taxation Phase,” 275.

deputies. In the event, the category never really took root in Estonia.⁶⁰ The formal definition of kulaks was dependent on the previous campaign in the Soviet Union proper in 1929–32. A kulak household had the following characteristics according to the decree:

- 1) used regular farmhands or wage labour in a systematic way (more than one herdsman or one temporary worker at harvest), or
- 2) systematically paid for non-family labour in kind, that is in products or use of machinery;
- 3) earned income from the lease of farm machinery;
- 4) earned income from mills or other subsidiary work;
- 5) rented out land for cash, or
- 6) earned income from commercial activities.⁶¹

This definition does not raise the question of land ownership, which the land reform had dealt with. The definitions were apparently made to suit the Marxist notion of exploitation—gains from sources other than labour—but it is significant that the definition did not require that the so-called kulaks actually work in agriculture, which had been important for the Marxist concept. Another special feature of the decree was that the term “kulak” was not ascribed to individual persons, but to households. It was also unexpected that every inhabitant in Estonia was considered a Soviet citizen from 1940 on, that is, even during the German occupation. Kulaks could thus be convicted for activities both during and after the German occupation, which meant that the legislation could be applied retroactively.

The task of singling out, or accusing, kulak families was given to the Executive Committees of the council system, not to the security forces or the Communist Party. How it was possible to find kulak households in the extremely egalitarian Estonian rural society is one of the mysteries of history. The decree was implemented with the usual

⁶⁰ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 110.

⁶¹ Decree of 30 August 1947, published in Tõnurist, *Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine* [Collectivisation of agriculture in the Estonian SSR], 228–35.

haste, within five days after it was distributed.⁶² According to the text of the decree, “the working people” were supposed to help the local administration in this task, and Communist Party members and security forces could also take part in open meetings where kulaks were discussed, although these two groups did not have an active role assigned to them in the process.

The kulak lists were then handed over to the county Executive Committees, which discussed the cases once more and sometimes asked for changes. When the lists were confirmed, they were sent on to the Council of Ministers of the republic. The kulak families learned about their situation at the latest when the next agricultural tax was due and their taxes were increased by 50 per cent. To be labelled a kulak meant that the entire family was stigmatised and carried the label of “kulak” as a formal status in their official papers. This in turn meant that they were subject to restrictions on their opportunities for study and work, they were thrown out of associations and co-operatives, and they lost their right to vote as well as other rights of citizenship. Appeals against decisions on kulak status—made by practically every kulak family—could be addressed to the county Executive Committee. If this committee did not support the appeal, a further appeal could be made to the Council of Ministers.⁶³ After a first round of appeals and corrections, new campaigns in which kulak families were singled out occurred in spring and autumn 1948, and a last and rather extensive revision of the kulak lists was made in early March 1949.⁶⁴ The local tax committees handled the collection of taxes from the listed kulaks. In 1948, kulak taxes were doubled again.⁶⁵ Representatives sent out by the tax committees went to the farms of debtors, assessed the worth of their assets, and handed over inventories of assets to the People’s Courts.⁶⁶

⁶² Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 28 describes the procedure. The attendance is recorded in the minutes of Executive Committees in Viljandi County from 1947 and 1948.

⁶³ The appeals are discussed in Köll, “Tender Wolves,” 137–40.

⁶⁴ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 39–41.

⁶⁵ Taagepera, “Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Taxation Phase,” 273–78.

⁶⁶ The rudimentary and politically influenced judicial system struggling to regularize its procedures, after the Soviet model. Professional judges were few, laymen were elected and had little training.

The People's Courts decided on expropriations of farm animals, implements and household equipment in exchange for unpaid taxes. In the following months there were new demands for taxes and new debts, and the same procedure was administered all over again, until nothing remained to be taken from the kulak farms. After the second tax increase in 1948, a special decree on how to claim kulak tax arrears was issued, declaring that only personal items should be left for the debtor families.⁶⁷ The procedure of expropriations was speeded up and had priority in the courts.

In this way the entire local administration participated in the repression of the kulaks. The process was open and frequently discussed at the local level, a contrast to the completely unexpected knock on the door in the early morning hours, which was the mark of the security forces. The historiography has not addressed the problems of the choices made by those in positions of power and the possibility to avoid, step back, shirk or participate in the process with obvious energy. Even if deportation plans were not openly discussed at an early stage of the kulak campaign, everyone participating in the process would know that pointing out a kulak family meant its economic ruin, social exclusion and political persecution. Being local people, they probably had strong feelings about this unsolicited and conflict-ridden process. Such feelings were only rarely voiced.⁶⁸

Another question that long remained unresolved was whether local people had been given quotas or numbers of people who should be found to be kulaks. Only in 2010 were documents found that showed that the people conducting the local anti-kulak campaigns were not given quotas or numbers to fill. As kulak families were deported in the last stage of the campaign, the security forces and those providing the logistics had, on the other hand, received quotas for each administrative district.⁶⁹

While the anti-kulak campaign was quick and devastating in 1947 and 1948, it did not have the expected effect on the poor and medium

⁶⁷ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 30.

⁶⁸ The theatre play "Küüditipoisid" in Karusoo, *Kui ruumid on täis...* [When the rooms are full].

⁶⁹ Rahi-Tamm and Kahar "The Deportation Operation 'Priboi' in 1949," 364–365.

farmers of making them join the kolkhozes. The CPSU Central Committee had adopted a resolution on "Collectivisation in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia" on 21 May 1947, that is, several months before the tax squeeze set in. This document provided measures to persuade peasants to join kolkhozes. They were compensated for the animals they brought with them to the kolkhoz, debts and tax arrears were cancelled, and inside the collective farm they were charged with lower forced deliveries than the peasants working on individual farms.⁷⁰ Still, collectivisation was very sluggish, the collective farms created consisted mostly of very poor peasants or farmhands who lacked knowledge of farm management, and the kolkhozes ran into economic difficulties. Not even members of the Communist Party of the Estonian republic had joined the collective farms, and were duly scolded for it.⁷¹ Only some ten thousand families had joined kolkhozes towards the end of March 1949.⁷²

There was a question of what was to become of the kulak families who had been stripped of all their belongings. In the Soviet Union in 1929 there had been a debate whether or not kulaks ought to be permitted to join the collective farms. Finally, with the defeat of the right wing of the Communist Party, it had been decided that they were not to be allowed into the kolkhozes, that they were considered exploiters and irredeemable.⁷³ This was consequently also the position taken in the case of the new Eastern European areas of the Soviet Union. The kulak families were leaving their farms, sometimes fleeing disorderly, at other times giving away their farms to state institutions. If they were going to continue living in the villages, they would naturally do whatever they could to show their frustration towards those who had brought about their ruin. The procedure was set up so that the closest enemies seemed to be neighbours and local officials on the lowest level. This was where the campaign and exclusion process had taken place, and it had not been kept secret. Discussions about and condem-

⁷⁰ Taagepera, "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Taxation Phase," 267–68.

⁷¹ Tõnurist, *Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine*, 341, 422, 424, 460.

⁷² Taagepera, "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Deportation Phase," 389, Table 2.

⁷³ See Chapter 2, pages 46–48.

nations of kulaks were repeated in the press, in open meetings, and in the conversations propaganda officers had with people all over the countryside, and as a result, tensions had intentionally been allowed to build up.

1.7. Deportation

On 17 January 1949, first secretary of the EC(b)P Nikolai Karotamm wrote Stalin a letter requesting the deportation of kulaks from Estonia. One might wonder whether Karotamm wrote this letter entirely of his own volition, or whether it was expected of him in order to fulfil the already planned third step of the dekulakisation process. The liquidation of the kulaks as a class had been discussed in the press much earlier, and it was obvious that the previous steps taken in Estonian agricultural policy had emulated developments in the Soviet Union.⁷⁴ Political scientist Rein Taagepera has remarked that the request of Karotamm does not follow logically from what is otherwise written in his report from that day. The letter thus seems to be another example of the legalistic legitimisation of an act of state violence to be found in the archives.⁷⁵ It was also apparent that Karotamm had earlier proposed that kulaks could be sent to the oil shale mines in Estonia, instead of being sent to Siberia. Stalin, who considered this proposal nationalistic in character, turned it down.⁷⁶ Instead, Russian workers were brought in to work in the oil shale mines, and Estonian kulak families were sent to the Novosibirsk and Krasnojarsk oblasts in Siberia.

The decision to deport kulaks was taken in great secrecy on January 29, 1949.⁷⁷ It was the end result of the dekulakisation campaign, which

⁷⁴ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 331–33.

⁷⁵ Taagepera's "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Deportation Phase" initiated this discussion, which later was taken up in the newspapers in Estonia during perestroika; see also Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 37.

⁷⁶ Taagepera, "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Deportation Phase," 395; Weiner "The Empires Pay a Visit," 351.

⁷⁷ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 37; Rahi-Tamm, "Teise maailmasõja järgsed..." [Mass repression in Estonia after the Second World War], 22.

was referred to as “liquidation of the kulaks as a class.” The deportation plans also targeted another group in Estonian society; the so-called bourgeois nationalists, another social category considered to be enemies of the Soviet Union, were also to be deported along with the kulaks. The security forces were in charge of selecting the nationalists, and this normally included the families of “enemies of the people.” Unlike the class struggle against the kulaks, this procedure was not public, and the secret list was compiled by the MGB, just as in the deportations of 1941. The kulak lists of the local Executive Committees, on the other hand, had been sent to the Council of Ministers in 1947 and 1948. The last kulak lists were drawn up on the local level in March 1949, and confirmed on the county level by the Executive Committee and the county head of security.⁷⁸ At the same time, special MGB agents were composing deportation lists on the county level, following predetermined quotas of kulaks. Apparently, they used the lists composed earlier by the Executive Committees, and it is uncertain how much the latest version was taken into account.⁷⁹ There were discrepancies between the lists used for taxation and the deportation lists. The MGB made a final selection of families to be deported, which consisted of 60 to 70 per cent of those on the lists.⁸⁰ Some families were added to the deportation lists during the final week, probably by security officers in the Ministry of the Interior, headed by Boris Kumm.⁸¹

Kolkhozes in Siberia were in need of labour power for the spring season. March was considered a good point in time for deportation, with regard to spring sowing, both in Estonia and in Siberia. Farm households in Estonia could be expected to change their mind about joining kolkhozes as a result of the deportations—such decisions had better be made before spring sowing.⁸² With increasing tax debts and arrests for non-payment, kulak families increasingly had been leaving their homes and were hiding, and as a consequence their land was lying fallow.⁸³

⁷⁸ Rahi, “Operatsioon Priboi...,” 52.

⁷⁹ Rahi-Tamm and Kahar “The Deportation Operation ‘Priboi’ in 1949,” 364–65.

⁸⁰ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 41.

⁸¹ Rahi-Tamm and Kahar “The Deportation Operation ‘Priboi’ in 1949,” 365.

⁸² Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 44.

⁸³ Kivimaa, “Eesti Kommunistliku Partei tegevus...,” 265.

Deportations were prepared as military operations, with extensive planning before the event. One portion of the deportation squads, approximately half of the forces, was from other parts of the Soviet Union; these were troops specifically assigned to gather and transport the deportees in special trains. Another half of the operative units were comprised of local people assigned to guide the foreign troops and to make inventories of remaining goods in kulak and nationalist homes. However, it seems as if the local participants had their tasks assigned only at the last moment—it was feared they might alert friends and relatives in danger. When the locals who were supposed to show the way to the deportation squads had been informed of their tasks, nobody was allowed to leave the room until the operation was started.⁸⁴

The trip to their final destinations for kulaks and nationalists included in the deportation was long, sometimes lasting several weeks. Conditions in the trains were very difficult, and the weakest of the deportees died on the way. Those who survived were left in kolkhozes, sovkhoses and lumbering camps, called special settlements, in different parts of Siberia in want of labour power. There, they would join kulaks and other deportees from the campaigns of the 1930s in the Soviet Union. When Stalin died in 1953, these forced settlements were reconsidered and the deported were given the opportunity to ask to return. The labour camps of the Gulag were evacuated first; kulaks from the special settlements were not allowed to leave until after 1956. Many of these applied to go home, but they were often prevented from returning to their home township or town, and the experience of return could sometimes be harsh, as local people were suspicious towards the former kulaks.

In Estonia, collectivisation exploded after the deportation. So many families felt obliged to join the kolkhozes that the administrative apparatus, which registered new applications for forming collective farms, actually broke down. Between 5 April and 9 April 1949, only a few weeks after the deportation, 4,800 families *per day* joined kolkhozes, according to the statistics.⁸⁵ By 1 May, just a month after the

⁸⁴ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 48.

⁸⁵ Calculation in Taagepera, "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Deportation Phase," 389, based on Tõnurist *Sotsialistliku põllumajanduse areng* [Development of socialist agriculture in Soviet Estonia] and Tõnurist, *Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine*.

deportations, 69 per cent of the occupied farms had been collectivised. The ECP Central Committee noted that the liquidation of kulaks as a class had been “a success.”⁸⁶

1.8. The Aim of the Book

The sketch of the Estonian countryside in its disruptive and often violent development presented above is based on the existing literature, one that has grown rapidly while I have been working on the local study presented in this book. Here, this narrative provides background and a context for the local scene that will be explored in the following chapters. It has taken quite some time to understand how and why decision makers at the centre took the decision to persecute the rural population, who was responsible, and so on. These issues have been explored and explained by brilliant and able colleagues, and to revise their work has not been the aim of this book.

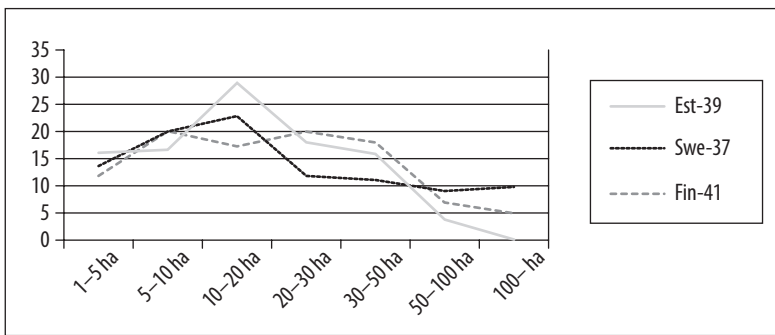
The aim of the book is to understand how these processes affected ordinary people under Soviet rule. When the order to persecute kulaks reached the county and township level, how did the local authorities go about identifying and finding them? This includes the elaboration of definitions of kulak families, the deliberations and changes made over time in the concept of the kulak, and also a review of the final outcome—those chosen to be condemned as kulaks. The outline of events will allow us to go deeper into how these atrocities were organised and what it meant for the local population in general. Some of the facts have been known since 1956, others, like the number of victims, were at the centre of discussion after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. The procedures involved in the collectivisation of agriculture and local participation in them have not been well known until recently, the second half of the 2000s.

The issues and questions that arose in a local study turned out to be different from the ones I imagined at the outset. The first problem

⁸⁶ Kivimaa “Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine...” [Collectivisation of agriculture in the Estonian SSR 1947–1950], 86; quoted also in Taagepera, *Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Deportation Phase*, 387.

was how kulaks could be found in an egalitarian society. The second—unexpected—problem was that the collectivisation process was entirely local, it was not carried out by strangers entering the villages. How was this possible? The local character also raised the question, how the line between victims and those persecuting them was drawn.

The rationale for the collectivisation campaign was founded on concepts of class, but an initial problem to address was how the class concept was interpreted in the Estonian context. In view of the egalitarian nature of Estonian agrarian society, how could kulak families be found at all? Estonian agriculture was, following the demise of the Baltic German aristocracy in World War I, one of the most egalitarian in the world. Land was evenly distributed, measured in comparison to the peasant economies of the Nordic neighbours, for instance.



Graph 1.1. Agricultural area per farm in Estonia, Sweden and Finland

Sources: Estonia, “Eelkokkuvõtted põllumajandusloenduse andmeist” [Preliminary results of the Agrarian census] *Konjunktuur* 57/58 1939; Sweden, *SOS Jordbruksräkningen år 1937* [Agrarian census 1937], Stockholm 1941, p.19; Finland, *Statistisk årsbok för Finland* [Statistical Yearbook for Finland], Helsinki, 1942, Table 68.

In Graph 1, the Estonian land distribution of 1939 is compared to agrarian censuses in Sweden in 1937 and Finland in 1941.⁸⁷ The Estonian farms were on average somewhat smaller than the Swedish

⁸⁷ Auxiliary land in sizes less than one hectare, often used as complementary income for worker’s households, has been excluded in all three cases.

and Finnish ones, but the share of middle-sized farms of 20–50 hectares in Estonia was higher than in both Finland and Sweden. There is, more significantly, a considerable difference in the share of larger farms; in Sweden, 10 per cent of farms were over 100 hectares, 5 per cent in Finland, but in Estonia there were no farms of this size. Estonian farms were middle-sized, and from the agrarian census of 1939 it was obvious that practically every farming family in Estonia did manual labour. The share of hired agricultural labour was small, and the larger farms often only hired farmhands during the spring, summer and autumn.⁸⁸ In such conditions, how did local authorities find kulaks to persecute in the rural class struggle? How was the selection made and what were the characteristics of those placed on the kulak lists?

A second question concerns those who were assigned from above to carry out the collectivisation of agriculture. These have sometimes been called perpetrators; this, however, is a problematic term, laden with moral judgement, implying responsibility and guilt. In Holocaust studies, a differing body of scholarship, though in ways cognate to that of Soviet collectivization, employs the concepts of victim, perpetrator and bystander; this scholarship identifies, on the one hand, individuals in Nazi society who were motivated to become perpetrators of atrocities through belief in the Nazi cause or through their position in the hierarchy, that is, professionals in uniform. On the other hand there were victims—Jews, communists, gypsies, homosexuals. People tended to know which group they belonged to, and also if they did not belong to either and thus were bystanders. Those in the latter group could look away, not participate, and still be rather safe.⁸⁹ However, in Stalin's Soviet Union, such categories were almost impossible to separate from each other. Perpetrators, carrying out the orders of the state were not protected, as purges often began within the Communist Party, spreading to sweep up the followers of the prominent people initially attacked.⁹⁰ In such purges, perpetrators became victims, and victims were also forced to become perpetrators. Finally, the demand for general participation in the campaigns for class struggle

⁸⁸ Agrarian Census 1939, table II.a, 20–21.

⁸⁹ The concepts perpetrator, victim and bystander are employed by Hilberg in *Perpetrator, victims, bystanders: the Jewish catastrophe 1933–1945*.

⁹⁰ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 293.

was designed to eliminate bystanders as a group whose personal security was not threatened. The entire population was invited and sometimes forced to participate in mass campaigns of purification and class struggle.⁹¹

In recent historiography about communism those who actually were carrying out the persecution have been called participants; although this term is not unproblematic, it is the one I will use here. Who were these participants, and how did they become involved? What was the logic of the system in which they acted? Another question is whether they actually chose to participate or were forced to do so. In the case of the latter, what kind of pressures and choices did they face? How did they react to the persecution they participated in? We know that there were extremely few sympathisers with the Soviet regime in the Estonian countryside, and so the question of how the participants became involved in the process is intriguing. The class struggle campaigns had, according to the historiography, at least two dimensions; they functioned both as outlets for understandable popular dissatisfaction and critique, and also as instruments of terror.⁹² Violence was rhetorically legitimised by the goal of creating a classless society and bringing about the victory of the oppressed underdog. But how did this work in societies such as post-war Estonia, where Communism had been introduced through military force?

Finally, was it possible to draw a line between participants and simple bystanders? This question concerns the entire conception of Soviet society in the newly annexed areas. To what extent were Soviet authorities, local soviets, the Executive Committees and the Communist Party isolated in the post-war society? Where did participation end and resistance begin?

Starting to investigate the local materials on collectivisation in rural Estonia, I chose to study the kulak campaign because it took place in peacetime, after the Soviet Union had won the war and was less threatened than ever in its history. The intention of this choice was to isolate Soviet behaviour. This was however not the impression one would get from the archival material. The war with Germany looms large in it,

⁹¹ Gross, *Revolution from abroad*, 114–19.

⁹² Gross, *Revolution from abroad*, 232–36; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 343–346.

and the question of what each individual person did during the war was one of the major issues. How, in retrospect, can the war experience be incorporated in the narrative of Soviet terror? This aspect has rarely been addressed by Estonian historians and only seldom in Soviet Russian historiography.⁹³ What was the importance of the double occupations and how did it play out in practice? It seems to me that this aspect deserves much more attention than it has had so far.

One kind of answer to the questions above is that the same agrarian policy was carried out in all the new areas of the Soviet Union, dictated by decisions taken in Moscow, disregarding local variations. It is, however, obvious that conditions in Estonia were not what were anticipated, and that the contradictions arising from these misperceptions were played out on the ground. A local study can show more precisely how this process developed and is an important contribution toward understanding the experiences of terror in the countryside.

1.9. The Local Study

With independence in Estonia in 1991, the archives of the Soviet period were completely opened to the researchers. It was thus possible to seek the answers to the questions above in a local study where the same people would turn up in differing source materials and their activities could be elucidated from several perspectives. The archives turned out to be almost like an open book since archivists had been tracing property lost through sovietisation in the course of carrying out indemnity policies adopted in the years after independence in 1991.⁹⁴ For a local study, an area in which the debate over dekulakisation was very active was an obvious choice. Viljandi County in south-central Estonia was a relatively prosperous area—it had been one of the granaries of the Swedish crown in the seventeenth century—it also had the highest proportion of kulak households according to local statistics. In

⁹³ The life stories of soldiers in the Waffen-SS and the Red Army during the war have recently been compared in a profoundly intriguing way by an Estonian research group. See Kõresaar, *Soldiers of Memory*.

⁹⁴ Archivist Tiit Lübek in the Viljandi County archive.

this area, only 10 per cent of the farms extended over 50 hectares of land; before the Second World War, only 13 per cent of the farms regularly employed additional farmhands.⁹⁵ Of the over twenty townships in Viljandi County, three with well-preserved archives were chosen for intensive study. In this book they will be called the Southern, the Northern and the Eastern township. They were not chosen with the purpose of finding extreme cases, but as it turned out they presented almost ideal contrasting situations, showing how different strategies were employed in the process of selecting and accusing kulak families. Even more extreme cases were examined, but not used in this study because of incomplete sources.

The three townships varied in size; the Southern was the largest, the Eastern somewhat smaller, and the Northern almost half the size of the Southern. They all had a similar share of large farms, though the proportion was slightly higher in the Northern township, indicating a more prosperous farm population there. A large number of farms had been deserted during the Second World War. The number of families regarded as “enemies of the people” were considerably smaller than the number of abandoned farms, at least at the end of 1945.⁹⁶ The Soviet land reform of 1940–45, which reduced all farms owning more than 30 hectares, affected almost a third of all farms, and thus had a major impact on the society in these townships. Differences between townships were not very large in these respects, but in the Eastern township a higher share of “enemies of the people” and a higher percentage of farms reduced in the land reform point to the possibility that the process was more turbulent there.⁹⁷

1.10. Organization of the Book

The questions posed above are analysed from several perspectives in the chapters that follow. The second chapter is devoted to contextualising the Estonian case. The theoretical discussions about class struggles and violence in communist societies are evoked, and the state of

⁹⁵ Agrarian Census of 1939, table II.a., 20–21.

⁹⁶ The numbers changed over time, as new “enemies” were unearthed.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 3, Table 3.1 below.

current scholarship is explored in relation to the dekulakisation in the Soviet Union proper in 1929–32 and in the new territories in the late 1940s. The specificities of the archival sources in a top-down society are scrutinised as part of the discussion.

Chapter 3 follows the process on the local level, with an emphasis on the role of the local Executive Committees, the village deputies, the Tax Committee, the People's Courts and other local actors. The intention is to study the character of the process in order to understand what participation meant and in what circumstances it came about. As we have few expressions of motives and thoughts of the actors involved, the unfolding of the terror process, and the extent of participation in the villages and townships, will further understanding of how it was realised. Of the three main organizations in Soviet Estonian society we have little material, so far, on the security forces.

How the term “kulak” was used and negotiated on the local level, by those actually deciding who would be a victim, is at the centre of the Chapter 4. Since there was no group in Estonian society which could be described as “kulak” with any degree of certainty or consensus, this was an exercise of construction. Finally this chapter analyses the outcome—the people actually chosen and accused of being kulaks.

Chapter 5 examines those responsible for making decisions on the local level from the point of view of their background, how they were assessed by their superiors on the county level, and their performance in dekulakisation. Attention will also be paid to the conflicts that unfolded in the townships as a consequence of the process.

Chapter 6 discusses the impact of the deportations on the local society. The effects on the collectivisation of agriculture will be measured, the division of the spoils of the dekulakisation campaign will be discussed. As far as possible, the fates of kulaks escaping deportation are followed, and finally, the purges following deportations are discussed. The purge of the Estonian Communist party throughout Soviet Estonia is a rather well known event and has been analysed at some length elsewhere. The sixth chapter describes the purges and all its repercussion on the local level, as an example of the many purges taking place in the Stalin era.

Chapter 7 sums up the findings from three different aspects. The first is the aspect of class struggle in the countryside and the interpreta-

tion of this concept. The second aspect concerns our understanding of agency and responsibility in the terror involved. The unpredictability of Soviet terror and the character of the process leading to mass repressions brings us to a somewhat modified understanding of Stalinist terror. Thirdly, the significance of double occupations for the unfolding of terror will be analysed.

Chapter 2

Soviet Repression as a Special Case of State Violence

Mass violence conducted by states has been a plague of the twentieth century. Attempts to explain it have generated a large number of studies—Holocaust studies most prominently—but also studies of communist atrocities. In the case of communist countries, and the Soviet Union in particular, there has been a continuing discussion on the role of violence in the society. Some historians emphasise the totalitarian character of Soviet society and maintain that violence was its main characteristic, inherent in the state-sponsored ideology. A majority holds that violence is best understood as a crucial, but not exclusive, part of the attempt to build a society, one different from those that had existed previously.¹ The latter view gives more scope for the context within which other parts of society can be equally drawn into the picture. While the determined focus on violence seems most efficient for moral uses of history, the perspective of building a new society holds more possibilities to understand and explain the violence.

This book contributes to the understanding of atrocities in the Soviet Union; it is my contention that mass violence should be studied as part of the communist attempt to change society. The deportations of kulaks and nationalists from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in March

¹ An overview is given for instance in Köll, Kan and Hart, *Research on Communist Regimes*, 20–26 in particular.

1949 were the most extensive cases of atrocities in these republics and left a deep scar in the societies. Other deportations and waves of arrests in the area were directly connected to the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, an aspect that considerably complicates the analysis of motives and driving forces. The March 1949 deportations, on the other hand, occurred four years after victory, when the Soviet Union was not directly threatened, in Estonia or elsewhere. Studying this case serves as an opportunity for an attempt to understand the violent tendencies in the society itself.

The deportations followed on decisions taken at the central level by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The decision process was largely external to Estonia and seems to have followed the pattern of the collectivisations from 1929–32 in the Soviet Union in a somewhat mechanical fashion. The implementation and its consequences were on the other hand strictly local. The decision to attack kulaks was almost impossible to understand from a local perspective when it landed in the egalitarian rural society of Estonia. In addition, local rural society had lacked perceptible communist sympathies in the past, which made the task even more difficult. Previous local studies of other parts of the Soviet Union have convincingly demonstrated the usefulness of studying violence in the light of power struggles, economic change and local social antagonisms.²

In studying the events on a local level, I found something that had only been mentioned in passing in the existing research on violence in communist countries. It was apparent that the local government—that is, the local branch of the council (Rus. *sovet*) system—was made responsible for the dekulakisation process, the attack on the so-called kulaks, to a considerable extent. Local governments consisted of ordinary people who had not chosen a profession in the repressive organs—the police, the various security systems or the military. They did not wear uniforms, they were not armed professionals; on the contrary, they were simply recruited among the local population. Was it really possible that ordinary people could be assigned such a task? How

² The most brilliant of these is Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain, Stalinism as a Civilization*. Its main theme is forced industrialisation, and the insights gained about the Great Terror of the 1930s in Chapter 7 clarify a great deal.

is it that they actually carried out such terrible actions without protest? Who were they, and why did they consent?

State violence in this case took a form different from that of the terror conducted by the security forces. The ruling institutions of the state, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Politburo, Stalin himself, decided to launch a campaign against a social group, still, local leaders were required to hand in a demand for it as a kind of legitimisation. Then they left it to the local community to decide exactly who would be attacked in the campaign. This means that the violence of the campaign was not initiated from below, even if there were attempts by party bosses to put the blame for the violence on local leaders. Still, local involvement was inevitable, and this participation was part of the functioning of the whole system. It seems, moreover, that this was the general way of conducting campaigns involving “class struggles”, such as dekulakisation in the Soviet Union proper in 1929–32, parts of the Great Terror in the late 1930s, and in forced population movements in the new areas conquered in the Second World War at the end of the 1940s. Ethnic violence and security matters were conducted by professionals, and parallels for such campaigns can be found in other cases of ethnic cleansing, and the treatment of dissidents in other dictatorships. The particular kind of state violence called class struggle, directed against a particular social group, was specific to the communist system. Another, better known instance that can be evoked is the granting of authority to young Red Guards in the Chinese Cultural Revolution to purge the society of bourgeois elements.

My local study of deportations in Estonia will focus on forms of violence particular to the communist system. This chapter investigates how this problem has been treated in theoretical and empirical terms in earlier studies. While the historiography of Soviet Estonia is relatively limited due to less international attention, much more has been written about the first dekulakisation campaign in the Soviet Union, and of terror in the USSR in general. In examining the post-war campaigns in the new areas of the Soviet Union, a number of new issues must be addressed, such as the national causes of the peoples involved, but also with events in the Second World War. Finally, the nature of the sources used in the study, and the language used in them merit deeper discussion.

2.1. Research into Violence in the Soviet System

How has this societal violence been approached in historiography? Past research on this period of Soviet history suffered from censorship in two ways. Scholars within the Soviet Union were not allowed to publish what they knew, and those outside had restricted access to the documentation and were obliged to work with more contingent sources. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, research into mass repression has developed quickly, as would be expected. A number of broad overviews of the Gulag have been published,³ and monographs with an analytical approach, written by historians, have been appearing over the past twenty years. But in comparison to the research on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany, the results still are meagre.

To begin with, few theoretical works have discussed violence in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as a single phenomenon, emphasising the similarities. The classical analysis of totalitarian regimes begins with a statement to the effect that they enjoyed popular support in spite of their violence.⁴ German philosopher Hannah Arendt explained the support in terms of social atomisation, following the breakdown of class society and solidarity.⁵ In another discussion of Nazism and Stalinism, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, born in Poland and working in Britain, maintained that people normally will have moral inhibitions towards use of violence against fellow human beings, and that regimes using large-scale terror had to circumvent these inhibitions. This was done through measures characteristic for modern societies, imposing obedience by authoritarian methods, and also with reference to the division of labour in society, thus lifting the responsibility from the individual actor.⁶ Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka is even more specific with his concept *trauma*. Trauma, according to him, occurs

³ On responsibility for the terror, see in particular Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 569–83; Werth, “Un état contre son peuple,” chapters 10 and 15. For overviews, see Applebaum, *Gulag*; Polian, *Against their Will*.

⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 305–6.

⁵ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 319–21. Her discussion of Stalinism is not convincing in this part.

⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 98–102.

when social institutions change fundamentally and rapidly. People trained to have certain skills, beliefs, rules and values find themselves in a completely changed context where these are no longer valid. The symptoms of trauma are disorientation, normative chaos and uncertainty about what is right and wrong, good and bad.⁷ The concept of trauma was developed with regard to the transition from communism, but seems to apply well to the transition to communism.

Arendt and Bauman were writing about both Nazi Germany and Stalinism, but their texts focused on Nazism. However, the overthrow of the social order as a precondition for a violent society seems at least as relevant in the Soviet case as in Germany. The reluctance of individuals and the techniques of overcoming it, brought forward by Bauman, have a universal character. To what extent modernity and impersonal responsibility should be blamed should be investigated. The similarities between the systems were emphasised in these analyses, but some crucial differences tended to disappear.

In a case-study of the town Magnitogorsk, historian Stephen Kotkin demonstrated how Soviet violence hit at all levels of society, as opposed to Nazism, where victims were more specifically defined. Men in power, carrying out the orders of the state, were not protected, as purges normally started inside the Communist party and spread to the followers of the prominent men attacked.⁸ Another observation, which seems very important to explain the behaviour of people, was the dominant discourse in the Soviet Union. It was impossible to escape the ubiquitous party propaganda, and people in the Soviet Union were simultaneously cut off from other sources of information. They could oppose official views, but the opposition would also have to be formulated in terms of the existing cultural codes. The Bolshevik discourse could be used to illustrate the faceless power evoked by Foucault.⁹ Finally, Kotkin pointed to the dual power of the Communist Party and the council system as a potentially dangerous construction in which rivalries could get out of hand.¹⁰

⁷ Sztompka, *The Ambivalence of Social Change in Post-Communist Countries*, 27–29.

⁸ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 293.

⁹ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, Chapter 5, for instance, 215–21.

¹⁰ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 286–93.

In a study of the Nazi and Soviet occupation of eastern Poland, historian Jan T. Gross has in particular noted how the state monopoly of violence was “democratised” and put into the hands of anyone who wanted to use it in the Soviet occupation. The entire population was invited, and sometimes forced, to participate in mass campaigns of purification and class struggle.¹¹ These campaigns had, according to him, at least two dimensions, functioning both as outlets for understandable popular dissatisfaction and critique and as instruments of terror.¹² Participation and complicity were expected from everybody; no room was made for bystanders. Victims of the system wish to point out and often look in vain for clear-cut perpetrators in specific cases, not just Stalin himself. In recent years, following seminal archival work by Nicolas Werth among others, this has become one of the main points of discussion.¹³

Violence was rhetorically legitimised by the goals of a classless society and the victory of the underdog. But how did it work in societies where communism lacked political support, like Estonia after the war, where communism had been introduced largely through military force? In Gross’ book, the concept “complicity” is used to characterise this process. Opportunities and restrictions were designed to make the population accept and participate in the overturn of society, in contradiction with earlier beliefs and values.¹⁴

In studying the Estonian anti-kulak campaign, it seems more appropriate to use the concept “participants” rather than “perpetrators” to refer to the people active in the anti-kulak campaign. The concepts “victims”, “perpetrators” and “bystanders” from Holocaust research are not applicable to the “class struggle” campaigns of communist countries, because there were no visible boundaries between victims and perpetrators. Nor was it possible to discern the victims in advance; it was often said that class enemies could be found where they were least expected. Even if it probably was possible for an individual to sneak

¹¹ Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 114–19.

¹² Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 232–36; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 343–46.

¹³ Werth, *L’ivrogne et la marchande de fleurs*; Geyer and Fitzpatrick, *Beyond Totalitarianism*, Chapter 4.

¹⁴ Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 230.

away and avoid participation, the intention was to involve society as a whole, and thus bystanders were not supposed to exist.

Participation was embedded in the structure of society, in its cultural and political dimensions. How and why did it work in a reluctant and newly conquered area? Participation works on a more general level than the individual actor. In this case, the form of decisions concerning kulak status can illustrate the concept. The central level took decisions to have a campaign against the kulaks, including the approximate number of kulaks to be "resettled" in each region.¹⁵ But it was left to the local level to decide who was a kulak, to point out a number of families in the local community to be economically ruined, socially outcast and politically persecuted.

If the Soviet Union is seen as an attempt to create a new kind of society, then it also had an alternative way or idea of popular participation, embodied in the grassroots organisation of councils of workers and soldiers, which emerged in the general turmoil of the Russian Revolution. However, the council form of popular participation did not even survive the Civil War in Russia.¹⁶ Very soon, the councils became mouthpieces of power and the grassroots level implemented orders from above, led and supervised by the Communist Party. As new economic structures under state power were built up, new powerful groups emerged among factory directors and chairmen of collective farms. Among other things, they were in charge of the social infrastructure. They wielded their power inside local governments, often in rivalry with the party hierarchy.

When the system was extended to Estonia in 1940, the council system had lost all traces of grassroots democracy. The Estonian anti-kulak campaign is thus an example of a specifically Soviet form of violence, carried out in ideologically adverse circumstances. It was carried out in a situation where the old class society was overthrown and social rules were redefined. The lack of sympathisers for communism in interwar Estonia begs the question how it was possible to implement?

¹⁵ In Estonia, this information was exclusively conveyed to the security forces, not to the local councils composing the kulak lists, according to Rahi-Tamm and Kahar, "Human Losses."

¹⁶ Democratic centralism, for example in Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR*.

Features like the dominant communist discourse, the rivalry between power systems and the aim of democratising state violence, found in previous studies, will be examined to see if they give plausible interpretations of the events.

2.2. Kulaks and Collectivisation in 1929–32

First, however, the campaign against the kulaks must be put into a broader context. The Estonian campaign was influenced by the previous attack on the kulak class and the ensuing collectivisation in the Soviet Union in 1929–32. As this process has been more thoroughly analysed by historians than the later campaign in the newly acquired areas, the historiography of the first Soviet collectivisation process will be discussed first, and the historiography of the Estonian campaign in 1947–49 in somewhat more detail, in a second part.

The collectivisation of agriculture in the Soviet Union was part of the so-called Stalin revolution, a decisive turn of Soviet history which includes also shock industrialisation and introduction of socialist competition in workplaces.¹⁷ Persecution and deportation of so-called kulaks, or dekulakisation, was an integral part of the collectivisation process in the Soviet Union in 1929–32, just as in the Baltic countries in 1947–49. Building collective farms had been a major part of the agricultural policy of the Bolshevik party for years, but the peasantry was reluctant to join the kolkhozes. Instead of drawing the conclusion that something was wrong with Bolshevik policy (which certain people did, but only to be defeated in the Central Committee), reluctance was blamed on resistance on the part of the kulaks, and more generally on kulak influence over the rural population as a whole. To expropriate, arrest or deport kulak families became a way of telling the peasantry that they had better obey the collectivisation policy.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 132. For a discussion on whether it was a conservative or revolutionary turn, see Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 3–5; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 5–6.

¹⁸ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 117; Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 397; Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 183; Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 483.

Peasants did not only resist collectivisation, they also resisted forced grain deliveries, which together with bad harvests resulted in a grain crisis in the cities at the end of the 1920s, which in its turn became a motive for forced collectivisation in the Soviet Union.¹⁹ However, in Estonia and other newly annexed areas in 1947–49, there was no equivalent to the grain crisis; instead, the timing of the collectivisation campaign was due to other factors.

Several answers have been offered to the question why kulaks became scapegoats in this terror campaign. First, kulaks were an influential part of peasant society, and their removal was thought to break passive resistance to both grain requisitions and collectivization.²⁰ Second, expropriated kulak property was an important way of serving the kolkhozes with means of production, animals, implements, seeds etc., when the state had nothing to offer.²¹ Most importantly, however, dekulakisation was a way of destroying the cohesion and solidarity in rural villages which kept state power at distance. Through dekulakisation the social fabric was torn apart, and later in the collective farms, Soviet power would be able to dominate and control. There seems to be no disagreement in the literature of the last fifty years about these explanations. Moshe Lewin's book, *Russian peasants and Soviet power* was one of the first important special studies, published in French in 1966. He speaks about a "veritable civil war" against the peasantry, and Lewin used this expression again in some of his late works.²²

¹⁹ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 94–98; Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 56–60; Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 114–23; Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 215–16.

²⁰ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 4; Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 404–8

²¹ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 236; Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 143; Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 494–95.

²² Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 6; Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 412; Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 19; Viola, *Peasant rebels under Stalin*, 13, 44 for instance. Moshe Lewin's version of why it happened, presented forty years ago, is for the most part still valid. Robert Conquest differs in that he does not see a possibility for rational explanations. He evokes the deception practised by Stalin and seems to argue that rational explanations are out of place in the Soviet context, see Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 6–7.

The whole concept of kulaks as a specific class in the countryside presupposes advanced social differentiation in the countryside. Did such differentiation exist in the Russian countryside or was this a Bolshevik invention? A new stratification within the peasantry during the New Economic Policy in the 1920s had followed a period of levelling in the Revolution and the Civil War. The Communist Party and the government had during this time favoured the well-to-do peasants. But even if some differentiation was under way, the differences were small, and the peasant group was basically homogeneous.²³ As the title of Lewin's book conveys, he sees the main contradiction between two sides—the peasantry on the one hand, Soviet representatives on the other, with a lot of mistrust in between.

Other authors confirm the picture of peasant homogeneity. There was no exploitation in a Marxian sense between kulaks and other parts of the peasantry. Those who were singled out as kulaks normally worked in agriculture and very few of them employed extra labour.²⁴ For instance, in his book *The Harvest of Sorrow* from 1986, Robert Conquest denounces the exaggeration of class distinctions by the Bolsheviks.²⁵ Lynne Viola, in *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* ten years later, emphasises peasant cultural unity, and asserts that the kulaks were considered as part of the peasantry.²⁶

Class differences and significant socioeconomic differentiation among the Soviet peasantry at the end of the 1920s—not to mention a distinctive kulak class—thus existed in Bolshevik propaganda, though this existence is not confirmed in the analyses of independent historians. A certain difference can however be discerned between, on the one hand, historians emphasising the united character of the peasantry and its refusal to comply with the regime, such as Lewin, Conquest, Viola, and on the other hand, historians such as Robert William Davies and James Hughes, who understood the process and the methods of dekulakisation as a means of creating new and unprecedented levels of conflict. If one of the aims of the collectivisation and dekulakisation process was to break up village solidarity and unity, the latter seem to

²³ Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 41–45.

²⁴ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 408–9.

²⁵ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 23–24, 118.

²⁶ Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 24, 99

argue that the goal was attained, while the former seem to maintain that although the peasantry did lose the fight over collectivisation, their resistance and unity still prevailed at other levels.

This difference of emphasis emerges in the description of how this process affected rural society. R. W. Davies' monumental work on collectivization, *The Socialist Offensive 1929–1930: The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture*, published in 1980, and in its wake James Hughes' regional study of the process in Siberia, *Stalinism in a Russian Province: Collectivization and Dekulakization in Siberia*, from 1996, put more emphasis on the methods used for dekulakisation and their specific effect on the social fabric of the countryside. Davies evokes the "Ural-Siberian method" of isolating the kulaks at mass meetings and using social influence in the campaign. It gave a "quasi-democratic framework for legitimising the campaign" and contributed to the breaking up of society by rallying its members on differing sides. Moreover, it resulted in the strengthening of village councils, or soviets, and made their ties to the central authorities closer as they were cleansed of unreliable members.²⁷

In the 1990s, James Hughes took up the new opportunities to use local archives in order to follow the process in more detail. In his book, he shows that the anti-kulak campaign was held in a paradoxical way. According to Hughes, it was not the mass meetings and social influence that was at the core of the "Ural-Siberian method", but the way of using the traditional method of peasant self-taxation, first in heavy grain collections, later in drawing up the kulak lists.²⁸ The method required the participation of the entire society in "local affairs" and the forced deliveries; the designation of kulak families was itself defined as part of local affairs. It was not only the threat and fear evoked by dekulakisation that destroyed traditional society—it was also actual participation in the "class struggle", the obligation to take sides against one's neighbours, which was destructive. While all authors see repression as part of the destruction of peasant society, Davies and Hughes add participation in the process, the democratic veneer of the selection process, as it were, to the ways of destruction. Conquest, too, admits

²⁷ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 234–35, 404, 412.

²⁸ Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 51, 73, 91.

that Stalin succeeded to some extent in inciting class struggle, and mentions that old grudges and personal gain were other motives for local people to participate in dekulakisation.²⁹ This is somewhat different from Lewin, who sees dekulakisation as a “purely administrative process”.³⁰ It is even more in contradiction to Lynne Viola, who sees peasant culture as basically undivided and opposed to Soviet assault.³¹ Whereas everybody agrees that the relationship between the peasantry and Soviet power was difficult and an eternal problem, it has thus been represented as more of a clear dichotomy and a process of subordination. The way the violence was conducted, by peers rather than by officials, suggests how the process of subordination functioned. Participation can be regarded as a major tool in breaking up rural society.

The responsibility for the decision to launch a campaign seems clear. Inside the Communist party a large-scale fight took place in the late 1920s, in which the right wing pleaded for patience with the passive resistance of the peasantry, and for the maintenance of a kind of market relation between the peasantry and the rest of society. The defeat of the right wing marked the beginning of collectivisation decisions at the end of 1929.³² The decision to collectivise, and to attack the kulaks, was made by the Central Committee of the CPSU, and more specifically by its victorious part. Stalin and Molotov made the decisive turn, according to minutes of the meetings.

Another problem worth consideration is how different parts of Soviet institutions worked together during the periods of terror. In his path-breaking book of 1958, Merle Fainsod presented a study of the Smolensk archive, captured in the Second World War, giving an uncensored picture of how the Soviet system worked. In Fainsod's view, there was no doubt that decisions were taken in the Communist

²⁹ Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 121–31.

³⁰ Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 81, 509.

³¹ Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 7, 12, 38. This might be an exaggeration of her position since she does not write about the differentiation of the peasantry, but about a unitary peasant *culture*. Still, her treatment of the few people siding with the state as an infinite minority, and peasant resistance as defeated but living on under cover, suggests a rather strong interpretation. She reasserts this position in Viola, *The Unknown Gulag*, 36

³² Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 113–14, for instance.

party, and that the role of the other institutions was to implement them.³³ While most authors have adopted his view, it has recently been challenged by Stephen Kotkin. He suggested that the relationship between the Communist party and the council, or soviet system was a deeply problematic structural feature of communist society. The leading role of the Communist party was theoretically clear, but how did it function in reality? His contention was that the difficult cohabitation might even have been dangerous.³⁴

In the collectivisation process, the relations between different Soviet institutions were quite complicated. Committees of three, so-called *troiki*, consisting of the local Party secretary, the leader of the security forces and the chairman of the Executive Committee (the local government institution), were used to execute orders.³⁵ The involvement of the three institutions is obvious, but cooperation between them and the difficulties this involved are not discussed, perhaps for lack of documentary evidence.³⁶

However, reading accounts of incidences of peasant resistance with this possible conflict in mind, one is struck by the predominance of attacks on village soviets and local Executive Committees, that is, on the local government, not on party officials.³⁷ Hughes describes the role of the Executive Committees in drawing up lists of kulaks, and he also gives examples of excesses that were brought to court. Those convicted were to a great extent people from rural soviets and low-level Executive Committees.³⁸ One might ask why the Communist party did not dominate this decision-making process if it was in an unquestionable leading position. Was it because party members and higher officials were not brought to court, or was it because the local government was the level on which atrocities were asked for and committed?

Another difficult question is the relationship between the local and the central level. Dekulakisation often started at the local level

³³ Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, 107–18

³⁴ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 286–293.

³⁵ Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 81–82.

³⁶ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 234–35, 405, 409–410; Viola, *Peasant rebels under Stalin*, 7.

³⁷ Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 166, 169, 174, 187, 193 and so on.

³⁸ Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 143, 146, 190 for instance.

before actual decrees were issued from the centre. Lewin observed how "...the activists and the local authorities hurled themselves upon the kulaks."³⁹ There was interplay between harsh, but still vague statements about kulaks from Stalin, the reactions from the Politburo commission drawing up legislation, and lower echelons, asking for the exclusion of kulaks from kolkhozes.⁴⁰ It is often noted that brutal statements and catchwords issued from the centre were very quickly and attentively taken up locally. According to Davies, it was uncertain how much of total collectivisation was carried out on direct orders from above, and how much it "emerged from local organisations in response to general directives to pay more attention to collectivisation."⁴¹ Hughes mentions the hysteria for fulfilment and over-fulfilment of plans in regard to dekulakisation, but at the same time he throws in a caution, saying that the role of the local activists was often ideologically decorative and even fictional.⁴² The fulfilment and over-fulfilment has been even more emphasised by Nicolas Werth in a study of the Great Terror of the late 1930s.⁴³ According to Hughes' study the strategy to isolate and "squeeze out" kulaks from the local community to some extent created local conflicts. In particular, he shows how the social influence method exacerbated relationships, and how self-taxation led to isolation of the kulaks.⁴⁴ In the process, independent village authorities were exchanged for individuals more loyal to the state.

Kulak decisions were re-examined in the Soviet Union after Stalin's famous article "Dizzy with Success" in late 1929. In the beginning of 1930 the judiciary was flooded by complaints from kulak families, and amnesty was given to many families in the course of examination.⁴⁵ This was a precursor to the appeals used in Estonia in 1947–49, even if the character of the complaints was spontaneous and *ad hoc*, provoked by the sudden turns of Stalin's rhetoric, rather than a regular legal process.

³⁹ Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 489.

⁴⁰ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 234, 409–410.

⁴¹ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 405.

⁴² Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 137, 146–149.

⁴³ Werth, *L'ivrogne et la marchande de fleurs*, 96–112.

⁴⁴ Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 51, 90, 123.

⁴⁵ Merl, *Peasants under Stalin*, 82–84.

It could seem as if there was a discrepancy between some of the empirical cases cited and the more general conclusions, revealing an uneasy feeling among historians about the question of low-level and local participation. If local participation is allowed and given attention, does that make the peasantry responsible, does it lift part of the responsibility off the CPSU Central Committee and Stalin? That would obviously give the wrong impression, since the repressions would certainly not have occurred without their resolutions and the press campaign against the kulaks. Still, the fact that repressive functions, normally monopolised by the state, were handed on to local activists and officials who, unlike the militia or security forces were not professionals, was a significant feature of Soviet class struggle.⁴⁶ The advantage of the “Ural-Siberian method”, according to Hughes, was that decisions about taxing and selecting kulaks were taken by the population without official participation.⁴⁷ A power struggle between the local government and the Communist Party emerged at times, and it seems significant that the peasantry attacked the local governments and not the Communist Party.

The state of the art on Soviet collectivisation in 1929–32 thus would provide some rather clear statements and a few questions to be explored in more detail in local studies. There seems to be a consensus about the aims of attacking the kulaks—to subordinate the rural community to Soviet rule, in the first place. Moreover, it was to break the influence of kulaks over poorer peasants and most notably their resistance to collectivisation. Finally, the expropriation of kulaks could also provide new kolkhozes with necessary farm equipment, cattle, seed, and even land and buildings. Dekulakisation was, according to most accounts, a joint attack of the three main Soviet institutions—the Party, the security and the local governments—with the Party in a leading position, taking the decisions. Local participation apparently existed, but to what extent is uncertain, and the problem has not been discussed in detail. The importance of local participation is not uniformly accepted, and there is certain unease in addressing this question in the historiography of Soviet collectivisation.

⁴⁶ Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 230.

⁴⁷ Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 73.

2.3. The Estonian Anti-kulak Campaign

The anti-kulak campaign in Estonia differs in context from that of the Russian campaign in the interwar years. One aspect is an ethnic dimension, where repression could be interpreted as not really targeting class but ethnicity. Post-Soviet Estonian historiography in particular emphasises the ethnic aspect. Another aspect is the intervening war, with double occupations of the territory, and the ambitions of occupying powers to make people take sides, whether Nazi or Soviet forces. This aspect, on the other hand, is almost non-existent in recent historiography, while it is almost omnipresent in the source material.

The first researchers working on the collectivisation of the Estonian countryside began their work in the thaw period after the death of Stalin in 1953. In the late 1960s and early 1970s an entire new effort was made to write history, with obligatory Soviet Marxist catchwords, but also certain openness for criticism of the Stalin period. While Soviet history writing in general cannot be considered reliable, a distinction should be made between works complying with the official view and others that constituted attempts to publish controversial versions within the limits of censorship. Three dissertations on the collectivisation process were written in Estonia and kept in research libraries in a few typewritten copies to which access was limited; these likely belonged to the latter category.⁴⁸ The ability to convey meaning between the lines, acknowledged in literature, also existed in history writing. Still, the dekulakisation campaign and the deportations were only cursorily touched upon, in a way that only well informed people could understand.

Relatively harmless summaries of the dissertations were later published in an anthology, and these versions then reached standard university textbooks.⁴⁹ As part of an effort throughout the entire Soviet

⁴⁸ Kivimaa, "Eesti Kommunistliku Partei tegevus..."; Laasi, "Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise..."; Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine...".

⁴⁹ Tõnurist, *Sotsialistliku põllumajanduse areng* [Development of socialist agriculture in Soviet Estonia]; *Eesti NSV Ajalugu* [History of the Estonian SSR], Vol III.

Union, a collection of documents about the collectivisation process was published in 1978.⁵⁰ The anthology and the collection provided previously confidential information and documents pertaining to the collectivisation process; the decrees were reproduced and even some negative reactions were recorded. The published versions were available for Western scholars as well.

These works have the perspective of collectivisation as part of the building of an alternative society. The anti-kulak campaign is treated as a way to gain control over the countryside, a premeditated strategy in three steps. The first was the isolation of the kulaks through the Soviet land reform, which was completed in 1945; the second was the exclusion of the kulaks through the kulak taxes in 1947–49; and the third step, called the liquidation of the kulaks as a class, was the deportation in March 1949.⁵¹ Local explanations are not evoked; the process was simply seen as part of Sovietisation, a model that had to apply to all new areas. The three steps were logically linked in one framework, the destruction of the rural “bourgeoisie”; the focus was set on the local class struggle according to the Leninist world-view, highlighting the social and political relations at the local level.⁵² Ants Ruusman writes that the authority of kulaks was a problem for the campaign. They worked and shared the lifestyle of other peasants, and managed to make the impression that they were the most hard-working and enterprising part of the rural population.⁵³ The influence of kulaks over the small and middle peasantry and even the organisations of rural workers are meticulously described.⁵⁴ The problems of finding groups of activists to denounce kulaks were also pointed out.⁵⁵ With these descriptions of rural cohesion, the official statements of class contradictions in the same works sound rather hollow.

⁵⁰ Tõnurist, *Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine*.

⁵¹ Ruusman, “Põllumajanduse taastamine...,” 343–345.

⁵² Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 203, 274; Ruusman, “Põllumajanduse taastamine...,” 340.

⁵³ Ruusman, “Põllumajanduse taastamine...,” 340–41.

⁵⁴ Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 203, 214–218.

⁵⁵ Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 207.

The leading role of Executive Committees and the Council of Ministers in the campaign is apparent in the descriptions.⁵⁶ The weakness of the Communist Party on the local level is also apparent and highlighted in all the dissertations.⁵⁷ Party committees often did not exist on the township level in 1947, and even if it was decided to form such committees, less than half of the townships had managed to do so at the end of 1948, just months before the deportation that marks the end of the campaign.⁵⁸ Where they did not exist, a lonely party instructor would represent the party. The picture of the rural society conveyed in this material is not incompatible with the accepted interpretation of the earlier campaign in the Soviet Union in 1929–32.

Western scholars were able to use the diluted published versions with more freedom of interpretation. Political scientist Rein Taagepera wrote a source-critical assessment of the Estonian collectivization based on this material.⁵⁹ His interpretation is new in some interesting ways. He emphasises reluctance on the part of central and local party members and officials in Estonia. In particular, party members did not join the kolkhozes, which was a problem for their propaganda.⁶⁰ Another observation is that kulaks were quick to join the kolkhozes because of excessive kulak taxes, while poor peasants often were reluctant.⁶¹ On this view, the process is one imposed from Moscow, under a certain protest from the side of the Estonians. The ethnic dimension is not expressly evoked, and a contradiction between the central and local level used instead.

With *perestroika* in the late 1980s, the deportations were seen as crimes against human rights. Estonian newspapers discussed the issue

⁵⁶ Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine...", 346–347.

⁵⁷ Laasi, "Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...", 10, 12; Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine...", 326; Kivimaa, "Eesti NSV Põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine...", 70.

⁵⁸ Tarvel, *Eestimaa kommunistliku partei*, 186.

⁵⁹ Taagepera "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Deportation Phase"; Taagepera, "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Taxation Phase."

⁶⁰ Taagepera, "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Taxation Phase," 272.

⁶¹ Taagepera, "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Taxation Phase," 276–78.

of responsibility for deportation decisions and in particular the role of the Estonian Communist Party (ECP).⁶² The driving forces were on the central level, this time expressly Russian; Estonians were depicted as being opposed, and the process was framed in ethnic terms. Estonians were cast in the role of victims, but also the agents of resistance.⁶³ The lists of martyrs assembled in the first years have the same underlying assumptions about the character of victims and persecutors.⁶⁴

Tartu historian Aigi Rahi (later named Rahi-Tamm) published a monograph about the deportations in Tartumaa in 1998.⁶⁵ The introductory chapter gives the context and a first, short and matter-of-fact description of the process.⁶⁶ She describes the three-step strategy to eliminate kulaks to prepare the ground for collectivization.⁶⁷ Rahi discusses the rather undefined category of activists and the problems of the ECP in finding new members.⁶⁸ The township (*vald*) Executive Committee was in charge of presenting a list of kulaks. Party members were asked to help, but they were mostly visible in cases when they were criticized for not helping out.⁶⁹ Mostly, council and party activists

⁶² Rahi-Tamm, "Teise maailmasõja järgsed...", 14–25 summarises this discussion.

⁶³ Kivimaa "Eesti NSV Põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine...", 268; Laasi, "Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...", V; Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine...", 115.

⁶⁴ For the townships of Viljandi County, an ambitious "martyrolog" has been assembled by Enno Piir in the ten booklets *Sakalamaa ei unusta* [Sakala county won't forget], Viljandi, 1994–97. Valuable information about particular cases can be found there. Still, there is a problem that the grounds for inclusion of people in the lists change over time, and contain a certain amount of hearsay. His lists depend on informants, writing letters, and are thus more complete in townships with many informants. The difference between the townships made in my work does not come out in his martyrology. Still, his work tries to cover all forms of repression (including arrests for fraud or theft, "normal" criminal offenses which rendered severe sentences in the Soviet Union). Piir's work hints at rather massive arrests in 1944–45, the "cleansings" after the war, which almost exclusively concerned men.

⁶⁵ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*.

⁶⁶ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 25–33.

⁶⁷ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 31.

⁶⁸ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 31.

⁶⁹ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 39–40.

are seen as identical representatives of Soviet power. She also points out the final role of the Ministry of Interior in the selection of kulaks to be deported.⁷⁰ This is well in line with earlier conclusions about the first wave of collectivization in 1929–32. The main part of her book is, however, on the deportations in particular, the identity of victims and their fate in Siberia. She chooses as her focal point the crossing of the Estonian border in the deportations, and not the persecution of kulaks in general.

The debate in Estonia has subsequently focused on population losses and documentation of the deportation, the final part of the campaign.⁷¹ Great efforts were made to make inventories of the deported and victims of other repressive measures in the Soviet period such as arrests and executions.⁷² The problem is thus framed as a conflict between Russian power and the Estonian people. The impact of the armed resistance—the guerrillas—on the decision to deport has been debated, whereas other historical explanations and assessments of social consequences have been given less attention. Mart Laar and others have described the resistance in greater detail, though the first Soviet-era dissertation by Evald Laasi already maintained a close relationship between the decision to collectivise and the armed resistance.⁷³ Historian Jelena Zubkova maintains that both a perspective of class struggle and a repression of armed resistance were taken into consideration in the decision to go through with the deportation of 1949.⁷⁴

The focus of post-Soviet research shifted from a longer story including the land reform and the tax campaign, to a shorter version starting with the decision to deport, which highlights ethnic contradictions.⁷⁵ The dividing line is set at the deportation of people over the boundary between the Estonian SSR and the Soviet interior, rather than at repression as such, including, for instance, those kulaks who

⁷⁰ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 42.

⁷¹ Rahi-Tamm, “Teise maailmasõja järgsed...”; documents in *Akadeemia* 3, vol. 12 (1999).

⁷² Õispuu, *Küüditamine Eestist Venemaale. March deportations 1949*; Õispuu, *Küüditamine Eestist Venemaale. June deportations 1941*. There are also many local varieties, in this particular case; Piir, *Sakalamaa ei unusta I-X*.

⁷³ Laar, *War in the Woods*.

⁷⁴ Zubkova, *Baltimaad ja Kreml 1940–1953*, 133–134.

⁷⁵ For instance, Rahi-Tamm, “Küüditamised Eestis,” 32.

were able to stay in the country, but lost their property and political rights. The question of the relationship between the councils and the Communist Party has not been an issue in the Estonian discussion until lately, whereas the role of the security forces has been singled out for special attention. In a recent University of Tartu dissertation, the question is raised, with new evidence, though the author does not draw firm conclusions.⁷⁶

The doctoral dissertation of David Feest from Göttingen, Germany, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum* [Forced Collectivisation in the Baltics], published in 2007, is an extensive monograph evaluating all the earlier debates. The book also has the merit of placing the Estonian “case” in a Soviet context. Among Feest’s new perspectives is the view on the national question; he does not accept the story of Russian enforcement and Estonian resistance. Instead, the ECP leadership could be seen as supporting one of two contending fractions of the CPSU—the losing fraction of Andrei Zhdanov, which advocated cautious collectivization in general and the use of violence, in particular, in the new areas.⁷⁷ The leading role of Russians in Estonia, which increased after a purge of the party leadership in 1950, is refuted on the grounds that Estonians actually were overrepresented in the leadership compared to their membership of the Communist Party, according to the existing Soviet nationality policy. According to Feest, a higher percentage of ethnic Estonians who had been living in the Soviet Union after were part of the *nomenklatura* after 1950. That can be seen as an attempt to follow the nationality policy formally, while giving precedence to cadres with schooling into the Soviet system.⁷⁸

His main argument, however, concerns the relationship between the central level of the CPSU, the Estonian leadership and the local functionaries in the system. He is certain that there was room for manoeuvring on the local level, and he also stresses the attempts to keep violence under control.⁷⁹ Feest argues that a disintegrated and shaky organisational structure resulted in ferocious rivalries and dependence on patron-client networks for support among function-

⁷⁶ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*.

⁷⁷ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 331–39.

⁷⁸ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 339–41.

⁷⁹ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 399, 405, 411.

aries.⁸⁰ In the newly occupied country, there were competing interpretational frameworks of ideology to the communist one, above all a nationalist framework. Nationalism had been widely encouraged and spread throughout Estonia in the 1930's, and the fruits of this effort had not disappeared when the country was under Soviet power.⁸¹ He also has the ambition to treat the local level of the collectivisation process in Estonia, but gives this somewhat less attention than the central level. His analyses do not exclude ethnic aspects, but point mostly in the direction of an alternative societal interpretation. Still, the dissertation can be criticised for omitting the Second World War from the story of collectivisation, even if Feest directs attention towards the fate of "enemies of the people" directly after the war. The continued importance of the war meant double pressures on the population and a necessity of taking sides. The war and German occupation are seldom mentioned at all in the entire Estonian historiography, and thus Feest is by no means alone.

2.4. Comparing Anti-kulak Campaigns in 1929–32 and 1947–49

Is it possible to draw lessons from the historiography of the first anti-kulak campaign in 1929–32 and use these for understanding the second campaign in the new areas of the Soviet Union acquired in the Second World War? The obvious difference is that in the second case, Soviet power was introduced with violence from abroad. This resulted in animosity between the local population and the new men in power, which could be expressed in terms of ethnic conflict. Moreover, the war had encouraged loyalties with two differing occupation powers, and this led to complicated patterns of retaliation.

Still there were also similarities in that the second campaign was moulded on the example of the first, with fundamentally the same aims and methods. Historians writing about the first and the second campaign seem to agree on their main aim: to break up a rural society

⁸⁰ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 422–24.

⁸¹ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 477–80.

where Soviet institutions had limited power over individuals and their economic production. The kulaks were thought to be very influential in that society, so removing them would open the ranks of middle and small peasants and farmhands to the leadership of loyal Soviet officials. Economic driving forces which through the property of kulaks could be used to patch up the new collective farms, are mentioned in both cases, if only in passing in the Estonian case.

The campaign of 1929–32 is analysed in terms of class, and the social differentiation of rural society played an important part in the analysis. The same aspect was also important for the early interpreters of the Estonian campaign during Soviet rule, although it was expressed in a typically dualistic way. On the one hand, class contradictions were emphasised in a textbook manner, while on the other hand there were extensive descriptions of how close the kulaks were to the peasantry at large. Estonian historiography later developed in the direction of ethnic interpretations, from the first independent interpretations by Taagepera and Rahi, which still include the prehistory of the deportations, to a more exclusive form in which only the deportations represent the repression. As the preparatory processes mostly took place between Estonians, the omission could at worst lead to ignorance about what this most important wave of repression meant to Estonian society.

2.5. Aspects Pursued in this Local Study

In the following local study, the question of victims and non-victims, participants and non-participants in local society will be emphasised. For instance, how were victims chosen? Equally important is the nature of the relationship between victims and others who were not victims. Stephen Kotkin's hypothesis concerning the deadliness of the societal construction of the Soviet Union, one with parallel party and local government institutions, is helpful. Secondly, this study investigates the ways and means of making local people assist in the dekulakisation. A basic assumption—following Bauman—is that participation in repression presented a moral dilemma. This problem is not often discussed, and the dilemma is not clearly outlined in the documents. Still, it seems a more plausible assumption than the oppo-

site—that repression was already present in the morals and culture of the Baltic peoples. The perspective that the persecution of kulaks violated accepted norms and values, and that both participants and occasional bystanders saw it as an injustice, has consequences for all parts of the study, not least the interpretation of documents. And finally, I have noticed the absence of the war and the German occupation in the previous literature about Estonia. Therefore, the question will be raised what the war and the struggle between Germans and Russians meant for the local population and the entire process of dekulakisation.

2.6. The Soviet Estonian Archives

In the Baltic countries, the archives of the Soviet period are completely open, even more open than the archives in democratic societies with a long history. The inner life of states are often exposed in a radical way when major changes in the nature of their sovereignty take place. In the Baltic States there are restrictions to access in Soviet time archives due to personal integrity, but these restrictions do not apply to the researcher. In addition, official archives contain material about all walks of life, economic, social and cultural matters.

During the Soviet period, archives were energetically, if not always professionally kept. There were three levels of openness: open, secret and top secret. The secret materials have seen the most interest in recent years—also in this study—but the vast open materials should not be neglected. Archival practices were more or less the same throughout the entire Soviet system, and the Baltic archives are well-kept representatives of the system.⁸²

Decisions about kulak status were recorded in the minutes of the Executive Committees on county and township levels. Minutes exist from 1944 onwards. Decisions were always recorded at the county level, but in the townships these were not uniformly kept. In one of the townships in this present study, all decisions were recorded in the minutes; in another these decisions were left out of the local minutes

⁸² See for instance Graziosi, “The New Soviet Archival Sources,” 14–16.

but still appear on the county level. There are often, but not always, minutes from village soviet meetings. The campaign against the kulaks was sometimes recorded, sometimes not. Who retained kulak status after appeals is sometimes not apparent in the minutes; kulak files are in these cases more accurate sources than the minutes. The highly formal procedure and the participants are, however, more visible in the minutes.

Personal and family files were, as a rule, collected because of a certain event, and were not followed up afterwards. They can, for instance, contain an accusation, but then end abruptly, so we do not learn whether the accused was imprisoned or released. The number of personal files might give an impression of a very efficient control system, but when the researcher tries to connect files from different places and times, the inconsistencies of documentation of one individual or family become apparent. At least in this post-war period in the Soviet Republic of Estonia, control was far from total.

Three kinds of personal and family files are used in this study. Kulak family files—files on the victims of the campaign—are one kind. They convey basic information about the family and its property, which can be checked to some extent in the previous agrarian census conducted ten years earlier, in 1939. There is a special column for the comments of the township Executive Committee about the family, and the grounds for kulak status are given. In most cases the file also contains the appeal against the decision about kulak status, including letters from neighbours, village deputies and other local residents—if possible these letters were completed with mention of party membership, war distinctions of the writer—and from prisoners of war. In some cases denunciations are included, but these are much fewer than is normally assumed. Often, but not always, there is a formal decision in the file. These files do not, however, contain information on whether the family was deported, or what else happened to the family after the decision.

Personal files of another kind contain data about persons employed in the local government, including chairmen and secretaries in the village soviets up to the highest positions in the county. These contain personal life stories, various forms, and in cases where the official was part of the county *nomenklatura*, a statement from the Party cadre section. From these it is evident whether the individuals in question

had been accused of negligence at work and had been served a notice (*noomitus*), a strong notice (*vali noomitus*) or even expelled. Normally there is also a statement of the reasons why he or she left his post.

The third kind of personal file can be found in the party archive. When individuals applied for membership in the Communist Party, they also filled in forms and composed a description of their life. In the forms of the 1940s, the questions revolved around the applicants war experiences. Did they live in occupied territory? What kind of work did they have? How could they verify internment in jail or other repressive measures endured under the Nazis? Had they resisted the Germans openly? A variation on the same theme were the personal files of those who had been party members before the war but had lost their membership because they had lived in occupied territory. Also in the party personal files were references from reliable persons, party members and security officers who made statements about candidates for membership.

Several series of documents in the local archives pertain to the kulak campaign. The expropriation forms of the land reform 1940–45 were collected in the "Black books". Convicted "enemies of the people" are listed and forms containing goods expropriated from them are kept in another document series. Every household had a household book, kept twice yearly, generally by the village deputy. Other parts of the campaign can be followed in the tax lists and the records of the People's Courts.

In the Communist Party archive, minutes have been collected according to county. These emanate from many basic organisations in the county, township, and workplace; conferences, plenary sessions, and general meetings; and the branches of the party, including the Komsomol and the party's women's organisation. The language of local party material from the 1940s is generally Estonian. From 1947 on, the minutes on the county level in Viljandi County are mostly in Russian, and the documents from the Central Committee are entirely in Russian. On the township level the minutes still are in Estonian, and documents from the Council of Ministers, the governmental organisation, are also in Estonian throughout the 1940s.

It has not been possible for me to follow the minutes in Russian in extensor because of my poor Russian. The registers are kept in both languages, however, so the most pertinent documents have been trans-

lated. Letters with complaints from ordinary people are present in the party archives as well as in the local government archives. In the case of complaints, which were taken seriously, a local party representative or someone in the local government was asked to investigate the matter and compose a report.

When collectivization began in 1948–49, kolkhozes and sovkhozes started their own archives with minutes, correspondence, and files of the socialisation of goods from new members, economic transactions and compulsory deliveries. Kolkhozes merged in the early 1950s, and the consolidated collective farms later took on many of the tasks of the local governments, and in practice became the principal power holders in the countryside.

In a situation of violent repression it cannot be expected that archival documents will display what the actors perceive as the truth. If someone risks deportation because of a sister who has escaped abroad or a brother who was forcibly mobilized into the Nazi army, he will of course try to conceal this. If it is necessary to belong to the working class to be trusted with a job or to become a party member, all data on the individual's social background will display this, and the researcher will only need to take notice of the apparently rare exceptions.⁸³

Thus, Soviet archives with their wealth of biographical data can only be partially useful. They cannot be used to study ideologically sensitive questions, such as for instance social origins, or the question even more unlikely to be answered by potential party members: Have you opposed the Party on any major issue? The analysis of the interest of the actors, and not the actual statements, will dominate when the stakes are high. On the other hand, the documents will convey the practicable clichés in society about social origin (working class or farmhands), education (only primary school) and occupation (preferably manual work). Diverging statements at once seem much more reliable, though such a conclusion can certainly be erroneous. Neutral data such as names, place and date of birth, civil status, and well-documented information on land ownership or place of work need not be doubted in the same way.

⁸³ *Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum: Eesti Elulood II*, 209.

The documents convey a picture of what the officials asked for. If they are read in order to understand what was considered important to the Soviet state, what stands out as crucial in the second half of the 1940s in Estonia is the question of individual activities during the war and the German occupation. No one would of course admit he was member of the Nazi administration or Hitler's army, but a number of detailed questions obliged the respondents to construct a history of their activities during the years 1941–44, which they then had to confirm with the help of witnesses.

The interpretation of the meaning of the war is a recurrent theme in this book; it is central for the understanding of this period.⁸⁴ Easily controllable information, as for instance participation in a given army detachment, can generally be seen as reliable. When an official or (more seldom) a neighbour had a complaint made against them, they were almost invariably accused of collaboration with the German occupation power, on top of the abuse of power or misconduct that had initiated the complaint. Accusations of German collaboration cannot be regarded as reliable without further proof. It may be concluded that if a person was accused of something, but not for collaboration with the Germans, then he or she probably did not have this particular shadow in his or her past.

The means of communication in the documents was coloured by particular Soviet-era clichés and language conventions, which Stephen Kotkin refers to as “speaking Bolshevik”. Several works have been written about the changes of the Russian language during the Soviet period, and there are some corresponding studies on the Baltic languages.⁸⁵ The interpretation of these clichés is not qualitatively different from the normal work of a historian, as much of historical work consists in the attempt to slowly see beyond clichés, to acquire in-depth knowledge about the context and to understand more of the

⁸⁴ On the importance of war, see Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, which will be presented more closely in the next chapter.

⁸⁵ Kangere, *The Ethnic Dimension in Politics and Culture in the Baltic Countries 1920–1945*; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, Chapter 5; Raag, “Soviet Occupation and the Estonian Standard Language”; Veisbergs, “Use of Euphemisms in Latvian under Occupation Powers”.

connotations of contemporary expressions, such as for instance “continuously using outside labour power” or “a good Soviet person”. There are no easy keys to this interpretation; it is a continual work that cannot be separated from other parts of historical analysis.

When interpreting the language of sources, it is also important to bear in mind that we are dealing with a repressive process in which everybody was frightened and most actors fought for survival, sometimes at the cost of others. A common observation is that the language was brutalised during such a process, especially the ways of speaking about the victims of repression, which itself constitutes part of their dehumanization.⁸⁶ In my work I have found it particularly striking how the invectives about the kulaks increase *after* the deportations in March 1949, for instance in the minutes of collective farms. This timing would suggest that at issue is a defence mechanism, rather than an expression of class hatred.

The minutes from soviet and Communist Party organisations of the late 1940s mainly contain decisions, and such minutes recorded in democratic societies can also be full of clichés. They include the questions discussed, the decisions made, and a few general exhortations to intensify work on certain issues. Reading minutes of a meeting in which two village deputies—the same two who were proposed from the start—are unanimously elected, while the meeting has gone on for several hours, necessarily leads to the question of what has been left out.

The soviets, or “councils of representatives of the working people” (*töörahma saadikute nõukogu*, TSN), in Estonia were not elected until in 1948. These wider groups were in theory supposed to direct and control the work of the local government. In the minutes of the councils, discussions were recorded, and these make an authentic impression, as deviating opinions and quite irrelevant remarks often appear. The elections were rigged, and it is probable that the participants used self-censorship in this context as well, but the texts generally seem direct and fresh. However, the councils do not really discuss the campaign against the kulaks that was already in full swing in 1948. Soviet society might appear monolithic to bystanders, but there were obvious

⁸⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 26–29.

differences between different organs. The language of the local government is much less politicised, but is also bureaucratically limited and seems to convey a somewhat desperate attempt to achieve normality. The minutes of the Communist Party, having their origin amongst people who were trusted or whose reliability was continuously screened, are much more open about shortcomings and local events. This might be due to the fact that party members had more common values about the necessity or even desirability of repression.

Another striking element of the minutes of the Communist Party and Komsomol is a discourse about purity and morals, which dominates the many issues about party discipline. The communist as a role model is a recurring figure of speech, and the criticism against members and local governments is sometimes acrid. This kind of harsh criticism later on spread to other parts of society.

Complaints from ordinary people were directed both to the local government and the local party organisations. This written source material at first seems like a good introduction into local scandals and power abuses, of which there were many in this turbulent period. But I have to confess that the reading of these documents became increasingly tiresome. The letters were long; the accusations very complicated and sometimes conspicuously petty, in short, dogmatists that exist in all kinds of societies were not absent from communist society. As could be expected, they used the clichés that were common goods at the time, and often confessed their belief in the class struggle and loyalty towards the power holders. The real and dramatic conflicts in society were, however, interestingly absent from these documents, although the selection I had the opportunity to read might have been too small for generalisations. What was apparent in them was the poverty of the period, manifested in complicated manoeuvres and transactions in order to obtain a sack of grain or some items of clothing.

In this source critical discussion, the lack of source material also needs to be indicated. The most conspicuous shortcoming is the missing documentation of security organs in the local and central archives. These seem to have been destroyed or transported from Estonia in the period from the late 1980s to the establishment of independence in 1991. The most relevant part is that of the forces of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of External Security. Repression was its realm, and

little of its work can be discerned from the archives of the local party or soviet system.⁸⁷ This lack might distort our understanding of the division of labour. The Ministry of Interior, for instance, conducted the deportations, but the lack of operative instructions and other expected records is serious. This particular part of the process has, however, been part of several studies by other researchers who have reconstructed its role from the evidence available from other sources in a satisfactory way.⁸⁸

The extensive use of personal files is in itself part of the control over the population. The personal files constitute a rich and vast trove of material, and here ordinary people sometimes speak for themselves. These files are, however, problematic as historical sources since they simultaneously were part of the control mechanism. Personal files on suspected kulaks or other opponents of the system contain screenings for sociologically defined signs of exploitation—objective class criteria. Such personal files also contain notes from officials, which pertain more to loyalty than to class. There were thus signs of opposition towards the official ideology in the personal files, but an outsider, not the person concerned, would normally write these.

Social class and social heritage were evoked continually in the personal documents and files. All forms contained questions about these, and in addition, Soviet citizens often were obliged to write a life story, or *elulookirjeldus* in Estonian, and it is clear that even in this free form, social heritage and social class had to be mentioned. The basic question regards the class of the respondent's parents and of the respondent himself or herself. Such questions are uniformly answered in most cases: "... my parents were working people, and I do not own any means of production myself," or something similar seems to have been the obligatory answer.

Why is this important? There are two assumptions in the official ideology to which these questions refer. One is that social class and heritage determines the individual's suitability for work, party membership or affiliation to the enemy camp to such a degree that it could

⁸⁷ Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet rule*, 158–72.

⁸⁸ Rahi-Tamm, "Küüditamised Eestis," 28–29; Rahi-Tamm and Kahar, "Human Losses," 363–66.

be dangerous to belong to the petty bourgeoisie or owner-occupier peasantry—two large social categories of interwar Estonia. The other assumption, strengthening the first, is that class is inherited by children from their parents. It was not enough to be a worker or without means; it was equally important to have the right kind of family background. Political consciousness thus was not directly determined by material conditions, according to the prevailing ideology. It was, for instance, not enough for a kulak to give away his property; he was still a kulak. And to be the daughter of a kulak would be a liability in any walk of life. Thus there was no way of escaping an unsuitable identity through political education or change of mind. The relationship between material circumstances and political thinking had often been discussed in sociological terms, but during the civil war in Russia it was used as a crude cliché in order to distinguish friends from foes.⁸⁹ From that point, it was brought a step forward from political thinking to collective guilt and collective punishment. People were not viewed in relation to individual actions, but to their status in social terms, and that is what the data in personal files echo. This was a basic part of the persecution of the kulaks, and its importance can be seen in the central position of questions about class and the uniform responses given in the documents. Thus data about these matters cannot be trusted, and this probably also applies to the data about education, since higher levels of education in themselves would suggest belonging to the wrong class.

The lowest level of the control system was the village deputy. Twice a year village deputies were expected to fill in forms in the household books, where the family members and their principal belongings were noted. The household books were meant to prevent the selling or slaughtering of cattle before the socialisation that took place after a family joined a kolkhoz, a lesson from the collectivization of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. If these records had been kept as intended, they would be a source regarding the movements and education of people, and the wealth of the peasantry. They were, however, kept by uneducated villagers who were replaced frequently, so their value as source material is limited. Often they merely state that a family had disappeared; in connection with the kulak campaign whole

⁸⁹ Werth, "Un état contre son peuple," Chapter 3.

families could flee with the only trace in the household books a line drawn over the columns.

There was another problem, which many historians of the Soviet Union have touched upon, but which still seems unsolved to some extent, namely the legal procedures in which the Soviet bureaucracy indulged. One obvious example is the elections with only one candidate for each post. It was decided in advance who would be elected, but the energy that went into the construction of electoral lists, the insistence on the participation of everybody, the transmission of the high percentages of those who voted for the only candidate seem incomprehensible—still this is what happened. The kulak accusations, the appeals against the decision to include a family in the kulak list and the expropriation of the kulaks were also framed as legal processes that were documented all along, as opposed to the arrests and deportations effected by the security forces that, at least in Estonia, have left no documents behind.

Chapter 3

The Anti-kulak Campaign

On 23 March 1948, the village soviet in the hamlet Metsküla* met to uncover kulaks. The village is situated at a crossroads, and the landscape is undulating and fertile. At the point where roads crossed, stood a large barn housing a creamery, where milk from the neighbouring farms was collected, with living quarters at one end. The village soviet had been created early on as a lower echelon of the township Executive Committee. Jaak K.* was chairman of the village soviet, 58 years of age and born nearby, the owner of a small farm. He was already a veteran, having fought in the First World War. When the Second World War hit the village, he was too old to participate, but one of his sons was forcibly mobilised by the Nazis and disappeared in the war.¹ At his side this day was the deputy chairperson—a woman—and the secretary. They had summoned seven village deputies, *külavolinikud* in Estonian, to the meeting to discuss which families in their districts might be proposed for the new and heavily increased kulak tax.²

A village deputy was in charge of ten to twenty families, distributing information from the authorities, controlling their contributions to logging and other forced deliveries to the authorities. They also

* The names of both places and people have been changed.

¹ VilMA F.318, Op.2K, Vol.4: 256–286.

² The Estonian phrase used in the minutes was *välja selgitama*, which means “to find out,” or “to sort out,” rather than “to invent.”

helped the militia in keeping order. The village deputies were elected at meetings where only one candidate was put forward for the position and were unanimously chosen, whereupon they received a work certificate and a badge. Deputies worked for rather short periods—for half a year or one year at a time. In return, they were freed from lumbering duties and could sometimes receive consumer goods on top of the normal rations meted out in the villages.³ The complaints of insufficient political schooling and misconduct by village deputies were many.⁴ Of the sixteen village deputies in Metsküla most were female and some were middle-aged. They made up the lowest echelon of the soviet hierarchy. There were scarcely any communists in the villages at the time, so this was hardly a convinced communist caucus.⁵ Repression was not their profession, and they had not volunteered to participate in the security forces. They were no strangers in the rural society, but ordinary citizens, and this day they found imposed on them the task of singling out a number of neighbours and acquaintances as kulaks for the sake of the ongoing campaign.

At this moment in time the anti-kulak campaign had been in full swing for half a year. As only a handful of kulaks had been pointed out in the village, a new effort had been called for. Demands from above had increased—more kulaks needed to be identified. Simultaneously, village officials had been asked to deliver more details and be more precise about presumptive kulak families. In the past half year, kulak taxes had been growing astronomically, and unpaid taxes were immediately followed by requisitions of property to make up for arrears. The village deputies might not have known, even if they must have suspected, that those who ended up on the kulak lists were also at risk of deportation to Siberia. Still, they were well aware of the fact that kulak status would imply economic ruin, social exclusion and political persecution.

It was probably not very easy for the locals to understand just what a kulak was. All large estates in the area had already been abolished after the First World War. There were no large landowners, since no

³ VilMA F.124, Op.1, Vol. 2: 4, stating the local interpretation of party orders. This is thus a normative, not a descriptive text.

⁴ VilMA F.520, Op.1, Vol. 1A: 13

⁵ Ruusman, "Pöllumajanduse taastamine..." 326.

one was allowed to possess more than 30 hectares after the last land reform. The special depots for horses and machinery, installed after the return of the Soviet army, had requisitioned available machinery. How was it possible, in these circumstances, to identify a rural bourgeoisie, a class of exploiters?

As a result of the meeting, fifteen new families were added to the list. The minutes of the meeting justified some of the decisions on the fact that the families identified as kulaks had rented land during the German occupation 1941–44, and thus cultivated larger areas than they owned. Other families, for instance with elderly women as heads of households, had leased out land and thereby received income earned without work. Several families had used wage labour since there were no men in the household. One of these was a woman over 60 years of age who lived alone and needed additional farmhands. Two households had owned a tractor and a thresher during the German occupation, which they no longer had possession of. One household still owned a watermill, which could not easily be removed. Six families had used Red Army prisoners of war, from the German camp in Viljandi, as farmhands during the war. One family still used “extra-family labour”—a girl who helped out since the wife worked in an office in an industrial enterprise and could not manage the housework alone.⁶

It would be difficult to maintain that this group had characteristics that were very different from the average peasant household. On the contrary, the impression is that the participants in the meeting had to try very hard to find anyone who would meet the criteria of a kulak household.⁷ Most of the accusations were based on circumstances that had obtained only during the German occupation. Everything except the water mill and the girl who worked in the household belonged to the past. Of the households singled out, none had been living extravagantly, had earned large incomes from the toil of others, or had abstained from participation in farm work. It seems as if those congregated to unmask the local kulaks were hard up to find anything to present to the township leaders.

⁶ VilMA F.508, Op.1, Vol.1: 49–50.

⁷ See Chapter 1, page 21 above.

The list was presented to the township Executive Committee when it met two days later. Again it was discussed, one family at a time, at a meeting beginning at four o'clock in the afternoon and continuing on until just after three o'clock the next morning. The result was not, however, what might have been expected—that the Executive Committee indignantly sent back the list with a comment that the choice was unreasonable and arbitrary. Instead, three families were removed from the list in order to be scrutinized more closely to see if the accusations were correct. These were the couple with the girl helping out in the household, the family with a water mill on its farm, and, a woman living alone who allegedly employed a farmhand during the war. Two families disappeared from the list without comment and were never reintroduced on the kulak lists. Ten remaining families were confirmed and sent on to the next level, the county Executive Committee.⁸ Jaak K. participated in this meeting, but the others present there may not have known the families listed at the village-level meeting.

Some weeks later, the village soviet of Metsküla held another meeting, with another set of village deputies present representing other hamlets and farms, and eight additional families were placed on the kulak list.

How did the local people end up in this situation, and why did they participate? This chapter is dedicated to how it happened on the local level, how Soviet power was installed and how it worked during the anti-kulak campaign. The events contribute to an understanding of how the atrocities were introduced in local life. Was the participation voluntary, and even enthusiastic? The problem will be addressed through discussions of the alternatives, even if the thoughts of the participants were not openly declared.

3.1. Seizing Power

Let us begin with a few snapshots from the area in the first months after the Red Army had conquered it in summer of 1944. The first is a letter from September 1944, sent to the Communist Party organisa-

⁸ VilMA F.133, Op.1, Vol. 21: 49–54.

tion from an old comrade. He was an elderly man, a party organiser in the Eastern Township who had retired to the Russian part of the Soviet Union during the war and was now back.

The destruction battalions, special forces from the war, ought to be more active in fighting against the forest brotherhood, he wrote. He had paid a visit to a person related to the German-organised militia, *Omakaitse*, together with a man from the destruction battalions. On their way back somebody shot at them, but from a distance, and they were not injured. "We think we know who did it," he wrote, "but we don't know for sure."

The population in the area had calmed down, he went on, but they still avoided gatherings. Most people who had been hiding in the woods before the invasion of the Red Army had now reappeared. Still, the previous local leadership was missing, together with the leaders of the militia and police officers.⁹ The selection of missing persons directly corresponds to the groups that the Soviet regime was looking for. Apparently both groups knew the current targets for Soviet power rather well already in this early period.

The other snapshot is from another part of the area. A female Communist Party member made a desperate plea to the county party committee in December 1944. An interpreter from the state security agency, the People's Commissariat for State Security, or NKGB—had arrived at the office of the county Executive Committee on 26 December.¹⁰ Interpreters were needed since the personnel of the security forces were still mostly Russian speakers and had difficulties in communicating with the Estonian rural population. The interpreter asked for permission for the NKGB men to requisition foodstuffs from a local farm. Since the Executive Committee did not have the authority to give permissions of this kind the interpreter approached the chairperson of the county Executive Committee, Elfriede Piip. She categorically denied the request, saying it would be a violation of the law.

⁹ ERAF F.19, Op. 3, Vol. 11.

¹⁰ Internal security was the responsibility of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD.



Elfriede Piip, a young nurse, was the first chairperson of the Executive Committee of Viljandi County in 1940-41. Following the German attack she retired to the Soviet Union and was part of the preparatory committee of re-occupation in Leningrad in 1944. She became chairperson of the Executive Committee again in 1944. In October that year she was replaced.

Later, the representative of the township wrote that word had arrived that the NKGB men had nevertheless gone to the farm and taken what they wanted. Two days later, the township had sent out people to make an inventory at the farm, according to guidelines. As they arrived, they were met by people in Red Army uniforms, who refused to let the local officials in, and who maintained that they had taken charge of the property. A new delegation was sent out, this time including a major of the army. The delegation learned that the sheep and fowl of the farm had been taken. "What is going on here? We are struck dumb!" the letter concluded.¹¹

It is not clear from the letter whether the farm owners were still living on the farm when the forced requisitions were made. A family member could have been arrested—for collaboration with the Germans, for instance, a charge which usually meant that the family property was taken in custody. Other family members might still have

¹¹ ERAF F.19, Op. 3, Vol. 11: 63.

been there, subject to repeated raids from the security forces, the militia, the army, in addition to the “lawful” expropriations called for by the township Executive Committee. Similar events involving the militia have been recorded, including instances when militia members who though they were supposed to compile inventories after making arrests, had instead stolen goods rather than delivering them to headquarters.¹²

These snapshots convey an impression of a chaotic and violent situation in this repeatedly war-stricken area. They also illustrate the precarious position of township authorities, caught between hostile forest brothers and a very reluctant population on the one hand, and anarchic, hungry military and security forces on the other. Both sides were armed, and their weapons could be used for pillaging private property.

While with the demobilisation of the army such chaotic events became less frequent, they were particularly visible at the moment of power transfer. The activities of the forest brothers went on until 1950 on a smaller scale. Still, the fact that complaints, in the form of the letters above were handed in suggests that the letter writers did not expect such events; they believed they were worthy of notice. The Red Army regarded the Baltic region as part of Soviet territory that had been taken back, not as enemy lands. This meant that looting and other excesses were prohibited, in contrast to enemy territory, for instance in Germany, where it occurred systematically. But there is ample evidence that ordinary people in Estonia too were subjected to looting—this belongs to the picture.

3.2. Local authorities

The central People’s Commissariat, which later became the Council of Ministers, was the central authority of the hierarchically ordered and centralised society. From there, orders went out to the counties. Each county was supposed to be led by a council, or soviet, consisting of “representatives of the working people.”¹³ Between Soviet meetings,

¹² ERAF F.19, Op. 5, Vol. 389: 38.

¹³ *Töörähva Saadikute Nõukogu* (TSN) in Estonian, led by an Executive Committee, *Täitevkomitee* (TSNTK).

work was to be led by the Executive Committee according to established guidelines. This was however not the procedure in Estonia immediately after the war. Here, the Executive Committees were nominated hastily since there was a desperate need to put some kind of leadership in place. The elections of representatives, the actual soviets, were not arranged until January 1948.¹⁴ Instead, the immediately superior level nominated the Executive Committees. The special cadre department of the Communist party controlled the candidates, scrutinising their political record and background, and approved or declined their appointment.¹⁵

In the local administration, the chairman of the county Executive Committee had the highest rank. The chairman had usually been selected from the group that had retired before the German invasion, and had spent the war in the unoccupied territories of the Soviet Union. There was a shadow government of the Estonian SSR, and beginning in 1942 this had formed operative committees in preparation of the return of Soviet power to Estonia. Groups of ten to twenty people were allotted for each county. These people were well acquainted with the Soviet system and were members or candidate members of the Communist Party.¹⁶

On a lower level, in the townships, the chairmen of the Executive Committees did not belong to the group of cadres sent in from Soviet Russia for the conquest of Estonia, simply because there were not enough of them. Most of the nominees were local people, chosen among sympathisers or, according to a central recommendation, among people who had suffered at the hands of the Nazis. Very few had been Communist Party members.

In the Southern Township, the Executive Committee consisted of people born in the nineteenth century. Most of them had been

¹⁴ These elections should be studied more in detail. An enormous amount of administrative work was put into the definitions of electoral districts, with lists of names changed several times and a lot of questions as to where a certain family belonged. With a view to the undemocratic character of the elections, the energy spent seems somewhat mysterious.

¹⁵ Such decisions are found in the cadre files. The regulations are according to the *nomenklatura* system, also regulating the remunerations and privileges of each group. See also Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 113.

¹⁶ ERAF F.19, Op. 3, Vol. 23.

working in a local sawmill, and were for the most part too old to have participated in the Second World War. Some were members of the Communist Party.¹⁷ In the Northern Township, there was rapid turnover inside the Executive Committee; the first chairmen were local farmers. In the Eastern Township the chairman and deputy chairman were characterised in the records as farmers and non-party members. The profession of the secretary was not mentioned. Other members of the township Executive Committee in September 1945 were introduced as a school director, a farmer, a district physician, a veterinary and even a bank executive!¹⁸ Such a group comprises a quite ordinary township committee anywhere in the world. It indicates that parts of the former municipal council had been retained, but with new men at the top. The members were changed over time with a rapid turnover particularly in the first years of occupation up to 1947.

The Executive Committee oversaw the work of various commissions, for instance an Agricultural Commission, which took charge of the pending land reform of 1940.¹⁹ The selection of commissions and responsible persons to sit on them was regulated by an order from the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Tallinn and commented on in a memorandum from the county Executive Committee to the townships. Commission members were to be chosen among four different categories of people. They could be members of the Executive Committee, or village deputies. Secondly, they could be members of the Communist Party, trade unions, Komsomol or other official organisations. Thirdly, they could be selected among representatives of cooperative enterprises and institutions. Fourthly, they could be selected from among active farmers, “occasional workers,” or representatives of industries, sovkhoses, Machine and Tractor Stations (MTS) or the more primitive variant horse and implement stations (HMLP). The Executive Committee was expected to appoint the members; all

¹⁷ According to their cadre files, which are detailed in Chapter 5.

¹⁸ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 2.

¹⁹ The county agricultural committee was nominated at the first Communist Party meeting on 17 October 1944. The chairperson of the county Executive Committee was told to nominate agricultural commissions in the townships. ERAF F.19, Op. 3, Vol. 1: 7.

commission members had the same voting rights.²⁰ Finally, there were ambitions to form corresponding units on the village level, with two to three villages per township. The first village soviets were formed in 1945.

Responsibility for implementing the campaign against the kulaks was assigned to the lowest echelons of the local administration. The first step was the land reform of 1945 and the following rectification campaign. These were the responsibility of the township agricultural commissions. They conducted the practical work, went to each farm and requisitioned property, and measured out the land to be cut off from individual farms in the land reform.

Formal selection of kulak households and a determination of the amount of their taxes according to a special procedure began in 1947. Primary responsibility still lay with the township Executive Committee, but the village soviets were used in the process of investigating and selecting the kulaks. This is the backdrop for the meeting in the Metsküla village soviet introducing this chapter.

3.3. The Land Reform

The struggle against the kulaks began with the land reform at the end of 1944, when all farms using more than 30 hectares of land were to be reduced. Decisions about the land reform had been made in the first year of Soviet rule, 1940–41. It was reactivated in autumn 1944, and it was decided that the land reform ought to be completed by December 1945. The decrees were issued before the entire territory had been conquered; however, most of the documents describing this procedure in Viljandi County date from spring 1945. The local administration was in charge of implementing the decision. Already in 1944, the term “kulak” was used in connection with farms of 30–50 hectares, in extreme cases up to 80 hectares. The agricultural commissions had at their disposal good data on ownership, since there had been an agrarian census as late as 1939, updating available data on ownership, land quantity and quality, livestock and the work force of every farm.

²⁰ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 2: 1–3.

Those who expropriated farm land, livestock and implements were thus liberated from the duty of defining or selecting the victims themselves.

The share of farms over 30 hectares was somewhat higher in Viljandi County than the Estonian average, since this was very fertile agricultural land. These old farms had been bought from estate lands by peasant families in the last decades of the nineteenth century with the help of money earned from selling flax. They were somewhat larger than the new farms that resulted from land reform in the Estonian independent republic in 1919. The agricultural commission of the Eastern Township had no less than seven members by September 1945. Most of them were local farmers, but the district agronomist was chairman and a dairy specialist was also a member.²¹ However, the minutes of the commission of this township as well as others indicate that only a few members were active and participated in meetings. Armed with an order and a form, members of the agricultural commission went out to the farms slated for reduction and began expropriating property. The chairman of the township agricultural commission started the procedure, reading the order to the inhabitants of the farm, referring to the relevant decree.²² The order also contained the grounds for expropriation—either the size of the farm or the fact that it belonged to an “enemy of the people,” or possibly that it had been abandoned. Within ten days of the decision, an official from the township had to measure the land expropriated and put out new landmarks. The document contains the signatures of the executor and the former owner, but also indicates in detail who had been present at the expropriation. Later, the same people from the commission came back to expropriate cattle, implements and so on.²³

It is easy to imagine the tension of these meetings on the farmyards. Still, twenty years earlier, the Estonians had carried out a rather popular land reform, expropriating the land of German landlords,

²¹ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 2: 6.

²² Decree no 189 on the return of land to Estonian farmers, and decree no 380 on the expropriation of implements, cattle, seed and fodder. These are quoted in Tõnurist, *Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine*, 59, 64.

²³ These documents, the so called “Black book” with decisions to expropriate land, existed in every township. I have here used VilMA F.136, Op. 1, Vol. 17.

so the procedure in itself was not unknown or necessarily seen as a violation of the general sense of justice. It seems, however, that the results of this hasty Soviet land reform were very much dependent on the will and capacity of the local township administration. The complaints were so numerous and energetic that the first secretary of the Communist Party, Nikolai Karotamm issued an official invitation to all who felt they had been unjustly treated to write to him. A long campaign of rectification of the mistakes of the land reform followed. Frequent, for instance, were complaints from Communist activists, stating that land expropriated in the land reform subsequently had been given to relatives of the farm owners, essentially meaning that the expropriation had been fictitious.²⁴ In these cases, the agricultural commissions had found a way to circumvent the decrees. Other examples of complaints were expressions of outrage that expropriators had been too ambitious and taken more than they were entitled to. Still, the silent resistance of under-implementation was quite characteristic of the local administration in these early years.

The entire procedure was open; those present were informed about decision-makers and the ground for decisions, even if they did not accept the regulations. Those who executed the expropriations were local people, not anyone unknown. The procedure was designed to convey the characteristics of judicial proceedings, which probably was essential, not least for those who had accepted posts in the local administration. Even the number of signatures seems a bit exaggerated.

In the three townships, approximately a quarter of the farms were larger than 30 hectares in 1939. During the war, about a hundred farms were abandoned for various reasons, the inhabitants having died in the war, migrated to towns or fled the country. Larger landowners had disappeared or been sentenced as enemies of the people—such a fate befell larger landowners to a greater extent than medium and small farmers, as a number of farms over 30 hectares in 1939 had disappeared by the time of the land reform. Those declared as enemies of the people numbered 54, but they were unevenly distributed over

²⁴ One example is Jaan L., an “enemy of the people,” who was left with only seven hectares of land. In the same decision, the remnants of the farm were given to Hans and Selma L., with the same family name. VilMA F.136, Op. 1, Vol. 17: form 121.

Table 3.1. Farms 1939, war changes and land reform 1944, three townships

	Farms 1939	Over 30 ha 1939	Abandoned 1945	Belonged to enemies of the people	Reduced in land reform
Southern	702	187	63	15	154
%	100	27	9	2	22
Northern	351	108	35	10	102
%	100	31	10	3	30
Eastern	590	153	36	29	161
%	100	26	6	5	27
Total	1643	448	134	54	417
%	100	27	8	3	25

Sources Column 2–3 of table 3.1: Agrarian census 1939, III *Põllumajandusloendus 1939 a., viihik 1*, Table I; Column 4–6: summaries of the land reform VilMA 133-1- 2 and 8, 136-1- 66, 124-1- 13 and 14

the area. More than half of those named enemies of the people resided in the Eastern Township. Control over or execution of the screening process might have been more energetic in the township, or there may have been a larger group of people serving under the Germans. Another possibility was that the Communist power holders wanted revenge, since there had been an armed clash in the township when the Soviets were retreating in 1941.²⁵ This was part of what has subsequently been called “the summer war” in Estonian historiography. In the Southern Township there were many abandoned farms. The Northern Township was smaller than the other two, but had a higher percentage of farms over 30 hectares.

The land reform was ended in 1945, but adjustments and rectifications of the decisions continued for several more years, until 1947. The final result was that 400 households, or a quarter of total farm households, had lost part of their land and implements, another group had received land, cattle and implements almost for free. The settlers

²⁵ Shootings between the destruction battalions and a group of armed citizens before the invasion of Germans were investigated in 1944–45. Lindmäe, *Suvesõda Viljandimaal 1941*, 188–97.

receiving land were supposed to live side by side with families who had been expropriated. Sometimes they even received cattle, implements and seeds from the same family.

In the official propaganda in the newspapers, the land reform was described as an attack on the rural bourgeoisie, a sharpening of class contradictions and a victory for the poor and landless rural inhabitants. A letter from 1946, written by a left-wing author to the Communist Party secretary responsible for propaganda and agitation gives a different picture. It conveys the despair and insecurity that reigned in the countryside after the land reform in Tartumaa County, just miles away from the area I have studied. The author emphasises the difficult situation of the settlers after the reform. They had no means to build houses; building materials were expensive and hard to come by. The settlers lacked cattle but still had to deliver certain quantities of milk, grain and timber, the so-called norms, at very low prices to the state's acquisition agents. The middle-sized peasants were in a difficult situation too, even if they had some reserves from an earlier period. Above all, nobody dared to believe in the future and to start investing for fear that cattle would be expropriated or the norms increased. No one considered the situation as stable or secure—everyone waited for the next move of the authorities. The embarrassingly high-pitched praise for land reform and the evoked support of the peasantry in the official propaganda was, the author wrote, in stark contrast to the general mood. It gave a ridiculous impression and contributed to the general mood of resignation.²⁶

3.4. Persecution of the Kulaks Begins

In August 1947 it was time for the next step of the transition in the countryside. Its aim, according to Estonian historian Ants Ruusman, was to marginalise or expel the kulaks from society, the literal translation is to “squeeze out.”²⁷ The means to attain this goal was increased taxes for kulaks. These supposedly forthcoming decisions, identifying

²⁶ Feest, “Mait Metsanurga kiri...,” 83–85.

²⁷ The Estonian phrase is *välja tõrjuma*. Ruusman, “Põllumajanduse taastamine...,” 343–44.

new rounds of families as kulaks, and this task was again given to the local administration. The Communist party and the security forces were to supervise the process, but were not given the task of making executive decisions.

This decision was fateful, not only because of the economic consequences, but also because kulaks were considered class enemies. They were stripped of political rights, socially excluded, and severe restrictions were placed on their rights to work and study. As far as it has been possible to follow events in the three townships, the process in all three was similar. The first step was taken on the village level, as the village deputies were asked to attend meetings at the village soviets to discuss the families in their range of responsibilities. The village soviets sent in their lists to the Executive Committees of the townships, where forms were filled in and signed by the chairman. On this level too, discussions were held over the proposals and lists were modified.

“Activists”—that is, people who did not have an official position—were supposed to participate in these meetings and give their point of view. The participation of activists was a very important issue for the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers, who repeatedly stressed that the Executive Committees must include them in the process. In practice, there was great variation in the makeup of those who participated in the meetings. In some townships, only the Executive Committee participated; in others, participants external to the committee were included, individuals described as farmhands or small peasants and, occasionally, workers. It is also possible to see that the village and township committees sometimes were at a loss where to find the activists, and simply asked family members to be present at the meetings. Leading Communist Party members sometimes participated, and party membership was dutifully noted in the minutes of the meetings.²⁸ Still, the meetings were not entirely open; activists consisted of a group of that was not precisely defined.

There were varying ways of recording meetings where kulaks were singled out. The new kulaks were always recorded in the minutes of the county administration, and their confirmation constituted the official decision. On the lower levels, it was not always possible to follow

²⁸ For instance VilMA F.133, Op. 1, Vol. 21: Minutes of 29 December 1947.

the procedure; not all of them recorded their decisions. My hypothesis is that this was due not only to faulty routines or administrative clumsiness, but also to a certain uneasiness. The declarations of kulaks were considered controversial, and the village soviets and the township administrations did not feel very confident in their work, even if they had orders, decrees and forms on their side. The township activities can still be followed in the files of kulak families. Only the chairman of the township Executive Committee signed the forms available in the files—other participants remained anonymous. With the help of the dates on these forms, it is possible to see when meetings were held, and in the minutes the names of participants were recorded. There are, however, enough testimonies in the minutes to show how the procedure worked.

A certain pattern held in the three townships here under study. The Southern township was silent about the kulak question in their written records; still new kulak families slowly ended up on the county lists and in the kulak files. The Northern township did not record the kulak appointments in the first round, in autumn 1947, though in 1948 all decisions about kulaks were recorded. The records from the Eastern township are very explicit and every kulak family was recorded in the minutes of the Executive Committee. In the minutes of village soviets, the kulak question emerged only sporadically. Since the township minutes recorded lists from village soviets, it is obvious that they participated actively. No later than the next due date of agrarian taxes, the kulak families became aware of their new status.

In contrast to the secrecy of the activities of the security forces, when the knock on the door in the middle of the night could come as a surprise for the victim, the struggle against the kulaks was public, held in the open. Practically all the institutions of the local community participated. Besides the Executive Committees on various levels, the Tax Commissions, the People's Courts and the militia were involved in the whirlwind of increased taxation, tax debts, court decisions and seizures that resulted from a decision to give a family kulak status. Each step of the process left documents and forms with many signatures. To this number should be added all those who stood to gain from the process—those who received goods at low prices from the seizures, farms that had been abandoned, the leftovers after kulaks had been deported. Often, it was the machine- and tractor stations and coopera-

tives, the state-owned farms, the sovkhozes, and later, the new kolkhozes, that were the main beneficiaries.

Everybody knew what was going on. Probably they would have known it without the official propaganda, but the campaign was simultaneously going on in newspapers, in meetings, through slogans and catchphrases. It was obvious that kulaks were declared as the class enemies; it was clear from the beginning of the campaign that they would be submitted to economic pressure, political persecution and social exclusion. The regime in this way was threatening the villagers, frightening them, pointing out who was a friend and who was a foe. General, widespread participation in this so-called class struggle was important, since it obliged people to take sides. Subsequently, they would have to defend their actions. The social contradictions in the villages were sharpening, as the contemporary ideological texts stated.²⁹

Choosing kulaks was difficult due to the lack of real social differences in the rural areas. The differences in land ownership, which earlier had been insignificant, had been yet more evened out by the land reform. The decree on kulak taxes emphasised the occurrence of exploitation, the use of non-family labour. Other criteria were the leasing out of land, obtaining income from hiring out farm machinery, or receiving income from the use of a mill, for instance. These were ordinary things in agriculture, and some of them were the result of common variations in farmers' life cycle; old farmers and families with very small children had, for instance, a need for farm hands. The lease of machinery or milling costs could possibly be used to demand excessive rates in kind or money, generally speaking, but it was a matter of judgement whether the costs were too high or not. There was ample room for negotiations over the interpretation of these criteria. On top of these uncertainties, the implementation of the decree was retroactive. It included the period from 1940 when Estonia was unlawfully incorporated in the Soviet Union, but also, and in particular, the period of German occupation. The unstated expectation was that while under German occupation the population ought to have understood that this was only temporary, and that they were expected to have kept to Soviet values. Farmers who saw in the German occupa-

²⁹ E.g. Buzulukov, "Kulakluse klassiolemusest," 16.

tion an opportunity to return to pre-Soviet normality thus became culprits. Finally, the three last years of Soviet rule were included in the retroactive implementation of the decree.

One way of going about the process, adopted by several townships in the county, was to give the decrees the benefit of doubt, and say that there were only two or three families who corresponded to the criteria. These townships were put under pressure as time went on. Still, such cases were later cited in the purge of the Estonian Communist Party as examples of an overly liberal position towards kulaks. Letters came from the Council of Ministers to the counties, and from the county leadership to the townships, exhorting them to intensify the struggle against the kulaks and to increase incomes from kulak taxes. Exhortations were followed by covert threats and accusations.³⁰ Complaints over the slowness of the campaign were often voiced from above. It was also the subject of frequent self-criticism at meetings. "We should intensify our vigilance and accelerate the work to single out the kulaks" is a phrase that appears repeatedly in the minutes of various meetings from autumn 1947 to early spring 1949.³¹ These exhortations, however, were far from always followed by action; instead the same words reoccurred from one meeting to the next.

While the local Communist Party sections were not responsible for this process, they supervised the struggle against the kulaks just as they did everything else. The local Communist party committee could express the same kind of reproach in a somewhat sharper way:

We have committed serious political errors, we have taken a liberal stance towards kulaks and have not organised small peasants and farmhands in the struggle against the kulaks. A serious shortcoming in the basic organisation of the party, moreover, is that we do not fight to strengthen political vigilance and irreconcilable stances against elements of class enemies and expressions of local nationalism.

³⁰ For the national level, see Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 39–44. For a local example, see VilMA F.507, Op. 1, Vol. 3: 15.

³¹ E.g. VilMA F.421, Op. 1, Vol. 2, 15: Minutes from December 1947.

The basic organisations have not involved small peasants and workers in the clarification of the kulaks. The discussions have gone on with random activists, and this has led to the omission of facts in the kulak declarations and because of the defective data we have only found three kulaks in this township.

The meeting decided ... to carry through an investigation of kulaks between 25 and 30 December, and before that every party member must prepare himself together with small peasants and farmhands so that they will uncover kulaks in their neighbourhoods.³²

Disorientation, rather than class hatred, was often to be found in the minutes of the local administrations. Officials were not ideologically convinced people, and their understanding of the many orders they were showered with could be rather pragmatic. In the Eastern township, for instance, they discussed what to do with two farms, one belonging to a Finn and another to an Ingrian each of whom lived in the township. They were considered enemies because of the war between Finland and the Soviet Union, and an order from 1948 stated that they were supposed to leave the country within 24 hours.³³ The first farm was given to a settler with a Russian name. Johan Ä. had declared his interest for the second farm. It is however noteworthy that Johan Ä. at this point had been declared a kulak and class enemy, whereupon he had given away his farm to the kolkhoz "Red Dawn." Now he wanted to have the Finn's small farm of 11 hectares as compensation. In a letter to the county Executive Committee, the township leadership thought it was his right to request the farm and recommended that he should get it!³⁴

The central authorities were particularly upset that the chairmen of the township Executive Committees in several cases wrote letters in support of kulak families. Letters of support can be found in practically every kulak file as declared kulaks made appeals against the accusations. Letters of support were written by village deputies, village soviet officials

³² ERAF F.408, Op. 1, Vol. 5, 45: Minutes from 20 December 1947.

³³ VilMA F.507, Op. 1, s.6. This was due to the Finnish position in the war.

³⁴ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 55: 18 February 1948.

and even township chairmen who had just recently signed the very document declaring that family as kulak.³⁵ Such incidents show that the local administrations did not light-heartedly participate in singling out kulaks.

3.5. Was there Freedom of Action?

Still, there was some freedom of action. This can easiest be demonstrated through the different ways that the three townships went about the process. In the first round of kulak accusations, the Eastern Township presented a list of kulak families 15 times longer than that of the Southern Township. The farm sizes in the two townships were more or less the same, and the number of farms was somewhat larger in the Southern Township.

Table 3.2. Number of kulak families related to the total number of farms 1947–49.

Township	Kulak families 1/10–47	Percentage of all farms	Kulak families 11/3–49	Percentage of all farms	Deported families	Percentage of all farms
Northern	21	6	47	13	19	5
Eastern	92	16	94	16	32	5
Southern	6	1	50	7	36	5

Source: Kulak files, three townships in Viljandimaa, VilMA 599-2. Number of farms according to agrarian census of 1939, Table I. Deported families according to the database of population losses.

As the campaign went on, the differences decreased, as the Southern and Northern townships were pressed to present more kulak families. But as late as 11 March, two weeks before deportation, the differences were quite significant. The pressure had been effective in the case of the Northern township, less so with the Southern township. The share of kulak families there equalled less than half of those in the Eastern township, and almost half of those in the Northern township.

³⁵ VilMA F.124, Op.1, Vol. 65, 3: a circular to all townships in Viljandi County, April 1948; VilMA F.507, Op. 1, Vol. 3.

Therefore the way the local administration acted mattered, and there was scope for differing interpretations of the task of singling out kulaks, demonstrated by the three townships. If the Eastern township showed signs of being overambitious in persecution, the Northern township seemed unwilling early on, but then capitulated. The Southern township, finally, seems to have been very reluctant to participate in the campaign; it too eventually gave in to the pressure, but not as much as the Northern township.³⁶ We have to keep in mind that even if all kulaks were not deported, they were still persecuted and lost all their belongings; they were not allowed to join kolkhozes and were thrown out of cooperatives and other associations, and their children could not be enrolled in institutions of higher education. There was the tragedy of “spoilt biographies”, well known in the Soviet Union.³⁷

The last column of the table reveals a different picture. About the same percentage of farm families were deported from each township. Thus, almost two thirds of the kulak families from the Eastern township escaped deportation, whereas a majority of the kulak families in the Southern township were deported. This equalisation however was not the work of the local administration—it was effectuated by security agents of the Ministry of the Interior, in great secrecy.³⁸

3.6. Appeals against kulak status

The families that had been declared kulaks had the right to write an appeal. These appeals are still in the family files in the local archives.

³⁶ This can also be followed in the documentary material about the township, see Chapter 5.

³⁷ Figes, *The Whisperers*, 260, for instance.

³⁸ Rahi-Tamm and Kahar, “The deportation operation ‘Priboi’ in 1949,” 365. The deportation lists for kulaks were based on the local kulak lists, so people who escaped local attention were generally not deported in that category. R&K emphasise that the security agents worked entirely independently of the local administration, but my small selection does not bear this out. Several families added to the lists on 11 March 1949 by the local Executive Committees were deported, which shows that there were contacts also in the last moments of drawing up the deportation lists.

Almost every appeal contained a number of letters of support, written by neighbours and friends, stating that they knew the family very well, and could guarantee that it did not match the criteria of kulak status. There were normally several such letters, sometimes even seven or eight. In Stalinist Estonia, these letters in the files constituted a danger to the writers—they could be used any time by the local authorities as proof that the writer had supported the class enemy and thus was politically confused if not an outright enemy to the Soviet system. Writing letters of support thus could be dangerous; still, little has been written about them as acts of resistance in the literature about terror in Soviet Estonia.³⁹

The files also contained letters of denouncement, something that is seen as a common characteristic of Soviet society. These letters might not be full proof of the number or frequency of denouncements, since we cannot know to what extent it was customary to stop by the Executive Committee and make an oral denouncement. Still, in my material of a few hundred kulak families, only a handful of letters of denouncements can be found. The number of letters of support exceeds the number of denouncements a hundred times. This might indicate the low extent of popular enthusiasm for the kulak campaign in Estonia. It was not a case of willing participation, which makes the problem of technologies of participation even more intriguing. People did not necessarily come forward on their own account; they had to be made to comply.

Time and again, the Council of Ministers wrote memoranda, exhorting local administrations that they were strictly forbidden to write letters in support of kulaks. Village deputies often issued such letters, certifying that kulaks were right about facts in their appeals against their status, but quite often, local officials also wrote them, referring to their knowledge about local matters. The struggle of the Council of Ministers against local support for kulak families shows that it was quite frequent. The local officials were standing in the midst of a rural “class struggle” ordered from above, showing sympathy and understanding for the kulak point of view, while they were expected to be the tools of the power holders. This theme, recurring in particular

³⁹ Kõll, “Tender Wolves.”

in the autumn of 1947, should also be part of the story of the anti-kulak campaign. Village solidarity and the lack of important social differences were still working, even in this dark period.⁴⁰

Another public part of the anti-kulak campaign was the treatment of the appeals handed in by those who had been declared kulaks. Appeals were submitted for decisions on kulak status, first to the county Executive Committee, secondly to the republican Council of Ministers. The procedure was painstaking and regulated. It is evident that there was an attempt to give the impression of a kind of order, one which was clearly to be different than the “bourgeois” rule of law, but which would still appear as justice. This procedure can be seen as a contrast to the activities of the security forces, whose operations were secret and against which no one had the right to defend him or herself. The arguments used in the appeals and the negotiations involved will be analysed in some detail in Chapter 4.

The appeals were sent to the county Executive Committee, who ruled on each, deciding whether they should be accepted or not. The accused could appear at the meetings and deliver their arguments. Those who were not acquitted could go on to the Council of Ministers. Discussions of the second round of appeals were arranged on a number of occasions. Committees travelled several times from the capital to Viljandi, listened to the complaints and discussed the cases. In popular usage this was called the “kulak court.”

A committee of very high standing appeared in Viljandi for the first of these occasions.⁴¹ At the head of the delegation was Nikolai Puusep, deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers and responsible for agriculture. There was also Aleksandr Sokolov, chairman of the Agricultural Commission of the Communist Party; sent in from Russia in 1945, he was a driving force in the reorganisation of the countryside.⁴² In addition, minister of agriculture, Aleksander Mäe, and

⁴⁰ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 65: 3; VilMA F318, Op. 1, Vol. 82 and many other places.

⁴¹ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A.

⁴² Tarvel, *Eestimaa kommunistliku partei*, 226–27, 593–96. Sokolov was seen as a „hawk” in the kulak persecution, the counterpart of the first secretary of the Communist Party, Nikolai Karotamm. Sokolov remained in his position after the party purge of 1950.

deputy minister of finance, Anatoli Tihane were part of the delegation. The importance of this discussion is conveyed by the status of those who participated; practically all the top actors in the realm of agricultural policies were present for two days in Viljandi in order to discuss the appeals of the declared kulaks, case after case, with the participation of the accused.

New meetings with officials sent from the Council of Ministers and the party top rank to discuss appeals were subsequently held with short intervals. The first meeting was held on 5–6 November 1947, the next on 8–9 December 1947 and then on 6 June 1948. In August, there was a new meeting, but the chairman of the county Executive Committee refused to confirm the decisions made there, since according to him those assembled were not sufficiently qualified. Only one representative of the central level had been present, minister of agriculture Mäe.⁴³

Over time, the minutes of these meetings became more superficial. The grounds for either acquittal or for leaving individuals listed as kulaks were no longer recorded; only the names were taken down, and unresolved cases were listed separately. New meetings were held on 7 October and 21 December 1948, and the last one was held only a month before the deportations took place on 21–22 February in Viljandi. By that time, the commissions were less important. Only one representative of the Council of Ministers participated—minister of local industries Ernst Ristmägi, besides the local representatives for the Communist Party and the local administration. The protest of the county Executive Committee against the lower status of the government commission thus seems to have been overruled.

When the commission had examined a case, a written version of the decision was sent to the complaining party for signature within three days, and a copy was dispatched to the Viljandi Tax Commission (*Viljandi rahandusosakond*).⁴⁴ The pending cases were sent back for investigation, and supplementary data had to be handed in after a week. A sign of hardening times was that families that once had been acquitted were reconsidered and taken back into the kulak lists in

⁴³ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A: 57.

⁴⁴ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A: 3.

1948. One new requirement was that absent family members should be specified to see whether they had been arrested, or whether they had disappeared or left the area in order to study.⁴⁵ The village soviets combed through the population another time, and more data was collected.

Still, the appeals and the discussions of appeals were not just a sham debate, even if it became more difficult to acquit, and even if many who had been freed from kulak status earlier were reintroduced on the kulak lists. In the three townships I investigated, 44 kulak families were finally acquitted from kulak status between October 1947 and March 1949. Another 19 families were temporarily taken from the lists and did not appear on them at the time of deportation, but were submitted to new accusations in 1950, in the aftermath of the party purge. They were thus spared deportation; together they amounted to over 20 per cent of the names on the lists.

Table 3.3. Appeals from October 1947 to March 1949

Township	Accused	Appeals	No appeal*	Acquitted**
Southern	59	43	9(3)	8
Northern	55	46	16(4)	12
Eastern	123	115	6(2)	35

* The parenthesis shows the number of families that did not appeal even if there was time to do so. Families included in the kulak lists in February and March 1949 probably did not have that possibility.

** These families were removed from the kulak lists to the special fund with files of acquitted kulaks in March 1949, at deportation. In some of the remaining files, decisions of acquittals can also be found, but as they had not been transferred to the special fund of acquitted kulaks they have not been counted here, even if it might have been due to sloppiness.

The negotiations over the definition of a kulak, involving practically all of rural society in these years thus were not fake or sham; they had real content. The room for negotiations was however limited by pressures from above for larger numbers of kulak declarations. The largest number of acquittals could be found in the Eastern Township, where

⁴⁵ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 82: 39.

the Executive Committee had accused a very large number of families, and there were few in the Southern Township, where the Executive Committee had been restrictive. Very few families abstained from the possibility of appeal. If those who were inserted on the lists in the final days of March 1949 are deducted, there were only a couple of abstaining families in each township, as shown in the parenthesis of table 3.3.

3.7. The Kulak Taxes

When a family had been placed upon the kulak list, the direct consequence was that the family had to pay kulak taxes. This process—like others involved in the anti-kulak campaign—was regulated in formal procedures, but soon enough these developed into an absurd spiral of ever increasing demands. It became obvious that, as was rightly pointed out by historians already in Soviet times, rather than to introduce progressive taxation, the aim was to make the kulak families destitute.⁴⁶

A decree from 30 August 1947 stated the forms of selection of kulaks and the amount of kulak taxes. The tax was steeply progressive up to 50 per cent of the income, and after a breaking point the nominal income was to be adjusted upwards.⁴⁷ Taxes were increased in 1948, and declared kulaks were taxed retroactively for the entire period.⁴⁸ A normal farm would pay a tax of 1,900 roubles on average, according to a taxation record in 1948, whereas the tax of a kulak farm would be 24,600 roubles, or 13 times higher.⁴⁹ Soon enough, the taxes became an impossible burden, families could no longer pay them and fell in debt. At this point a round of legal procedures began, inventories were made of the kulak families' belongings, and animals, implements and household utensils were taken into custody by decision of the People's Court. A special decree gave kulak matters priority in the

⁴⁶ Ruusman, "Põllumajanduse taastamine...", 343.

⁴⁷ Laasi, "Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...", 204.

⁴⁸ VilMA F.578, Op. 3, Vol. 69.

⁴⁹ VilMA F.579, Op. 3, Vol. 11: 9.

courts. As the land had been nationalised and leased in perpetuity, only implements, cattle and other movables could be taken.

To show how thorough the process was, a concrete example is perhaps more effective than a statistical overview. I have chosen the fairly ordinary pile of documents pertaining to the seizures related to the tax arrears of the family of Peeter Ö. in the Southern township in 1948. The family had been declared kulak in May 1948. According to the kulak declaration, for two years they had used non-family labour—a Red Army POW. In addition, it was noted that two of the children had fled to Sweden in 1944, and the husband had held a local position during the Nazi occupation.⁵⁰ In August 1948 the family received an invoice for 28,905 roubles in agricultural taxes. The size of this sum can be compared to the sums of the seized movables: 6,000 roubles for a horse and 1,000 roubles each for the cows. The kulak tax for one year would have been sufficient to buy an entire new herd of cattle. It was to be paid in three instalments—in September, November and December. Already on the first occasion in September 1948, the family incurred a debt of 8.635 roubles.

At the end of September, the seizures started. Officials from the township made an inventory of goods. The printed form demanded the signatures of two witnesses, and a signature from the head of the kulak family. The form referred to the decree on tax arrears (§ 473 from the 1944 decree) and stated the sum of the debt. The debtor could write his complaints or remarks on the back of the form, and the tax official was given room for his retorts. The tax official then signed the document. This time, a horse and two cows were taken in custody, but already on 9 October a new request for more seizures was posted to the People's Court on which the court decided within 10 days. New signatures accompanied this document—those of the chairman of the court, the other members of the court and the secretary. The seizure was due in November; when the fateful day arrived a tax official and three witnesses participated. The remaining cattle of the farm were seized. The former owners had to sign the document. Peeter Ö. did not find the strength to be present, so his wife Ida signed the paper.

⁵⁰ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 106.

The next step in the process was the selling of the expropriated goods to a local kolkhoz named "Bolshevik." Suddenly, the cash worth of the farm animals dropped dramatically. The seized items had fallen in market price, so the goods had been re-evaluated. More goods had to be seized as a consequence.

But before this process had come to an end, the tax officials were once more back on the farm. On 26 October the remaining farm animals, calves, sheep, pigs and fowl, implements, coaches, sleighs, a riddle, a large scale, a sowing machine, barrels, roof thatching materials, and milk vessels were added to the inventory. From the living quarters the inventory included a settee, a large dining table and six chairs, a second table and a wardrobe. The court decision to take these items was ready by 27 November, and the decision was to implement the seizure immediately. This time, there was only one signature on the decision; it seems the procedure had been simplified.⁵¹

The evaluators making the inventory were back on the farm for the third time on 20 November and Peeter's wife Ida again received them. They evaluated the following items: a red cow, potatoes, fodder, hay, sacks of seeds, the winter supply of fuel measuring 36 cubic metres, a shed, and a barn with a sauna and dry storage. The living quarters were also on the list but were not evaluated. This time Ida Ö. protested. The cow, she said, did not belong to her family. Since the family needed money, it had been sold to Kadri T. who lived on the farm. The tax official responded: "The cow was in the cowshed, the alleged new owner was not at home, so I counted in the cow without considering the protest. If it is true that it has a new owner, she can later ask for her property back." The tax official added: "No other items of property were left to seize."

On 18 January the potatoes, the fodder, hay, seeds, fuel and the farm buildings were seized according to the list. Apparently, Kadri T. had got her cow back. The items were transferred to a dairy cooperative, while the township Executive Committee received the cowsheds and storage houses.⁵²

⁵¹ The heading reads *Täiteleht*, which can be understood as supplementary actions.

⁵² VilMA F.579, Op. 3, Vol. 149: 1–14.

From 18 January 1949 to 25 March, Peeter and Ida Ö. thus sat in a cold, practically empty house with their four-year-old daughter. They were still entitled to the right to use their land of 25 hectares, but it seems unlikely that they could have started spring sowing without draft animals or implements, knowing that new agricultural taxes would be due the next year. We can only imagine what they thought about their future. At the end of March, they did not have to think any more; they were deported, and Peeter died in Siberia.

There were cases of kulak expropriations in which even lesser items such as curtains and household utensils were seized. Still, most cases are similar to that of Peeter and Ida Ö., and the kulak families were hopelessly in debt by autumn 1948. Already in December 1947, after the first round of kulak declarations, their joint tax debt was 300,000 roubles. An overview of tax arrears in the county in October 1948 shows that 475 of 633 families (75 per cent) declared to be kulaks were indebted. By January 1949, 82 per cent of kulak families were in debt.⁵³ These kulak families could not go on farming. Families included only later in the kulak lists—late autumn 1948 or early in 1949—had not incurred the same tax burdens, but would know what they were to expect. The kulak taxes had to be paid retroactively.

People could be arrested and sent to the Gulag because of tax arrears, according to the law. In my material, however, this did not happen frequently as they were not immediately arrested and many kulak families either fled or were deported. There were also cases in which debts were considered hopeless and were written off. In the Southern township there was a concerned debate about the report of the local tax official in May 1948. The family of Pihla farm had not been able to pay their taxes. The farm had been reduced in the land reform, all movables had been seized by decision of the People's Court to cover tax debts, and the farm itself had been incorporated in a nearby sovkhos. The indebted family—the former farm owner and his sister—were over 70 years of age, and there was nothing more to be seized to cover the debts. The Executive Committee at that point decided the taxes could not be paid and suggested that the County tax

⁵³ VilMA F.579, Op. 3, Vol. 69.

administration should write off the debt.⁵⁴ The elderly siblings escaped deportation.

3.8. The Exclusion of Kulaks

Kulaks were not allowed to join kolkhozes—that had been decided before the kulak campaign began in autumn 1947. The decree regarded expressly all the Baltic republics and was an implementation of a similar prohibition in other areas of the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ When collectivization was debated in the Soviet Union in 1929, this had been one of the problems. If the kulaks were not allowed to work in the kolkhozes, what should become of them? This was a matter of conflict between left and right, and deportations seem to have been a partial answer to the problem. In Soviet Russia and the original parts of the Soviet Union in 1929–32 there were two categories of kulaks: those considered harmless, who were entitled to live in the outskirts of their original communities; and those considered dangerous, and these were deported. There was also a third category to be taken care of by the OGPU, the political police.⁵⁶ Those who were deported often left their forced settlements within the Soviet hinterland and roamed the countryside, full of understandable ideas of revenge. It seems as if Soviet society could not resolve what to do with the class enemies it had pointed out and degraded. The former kulaks, seen as “socially alien elements,” comprised a large share of those executed in the Great Terror of the late 1930s in the Soviet Union.⁵⁷ When the anti-kulak campaign was unleashed in the new territories after the war, the regime had the experience of deportations, but there was still no solution for the problems in the Siberian settlements.

In the Baltic republics, the kolkhozes, cooperatives and other organisations were purged of kulaks in the campaign. The Northern township, for instance, purged the local agricultural cooperative

⁵⁴ VilMA F.136, Op.1, Vol.

⁵⁵ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 33.

⁵⁶ OGPU was the name of the political police 1928–32, succeeded by the NKVD. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, 166–67.

⁵⁷ Werth, *L'ivrogne et la marchande de fleurs*, 75–79.

(which functioned more like a German producer cooperative, not as a kolkhoz) of kulaks in February 1948. The machine cooperative in the same township was purged of 10 kulak families at the same time. This policy was used throughout the area, and it was unconditional.⁵⁸

This was also the time for kulak families to hand in requests to give away their farms, seemingly the only way to escape the tax spiral. As the rural population throughout history had been fighting for their right to the land, these documents give an almost surrealistic impression. That dozens of rural households would ask to give away their entire farms without any economic compensation seems bizarre, but it was just part of the unending struggle of farmers to escape being accused of being kulaks. At the time, these letters were much discussed in local society. Kulak families understood that they had no future in the countryside and chose to leave their family farms to a sovkhos or machine- and tractor-station in the neighbourhood. The precondition was that they had to give up the entire farm. Farm land, implements and cattle could not be sold, nor could only portions of them be given away, otherwise this would have allowed a kulak family to attain the desirable status of poor peasants. We can only guess at the desperation leading to a decision to give away the family farm, which represented the toil of a lifetime.⁵⁹

A conference of the Communist Party of Viljandi County in February 1948 discussed agricultural matters, including the giving away of farms by kulaks. Some of the opinions regarding this question deserve to be quoted:

When kulaks give away their farms in order to escape to other working areas, difficulties arise. Therefore, we should not allow them to give away their farms, comrade E. [chairman of a township Executive Committee/AMK] said in his speech. On the other hand, if we forbid this, the production of their household decreases, the kulaks no longer care about their farms, and the fertilisers stay in the shed instead of being used.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ VilMA F.133, Op. 1, Vol. 21: Minutes of 28 February 1948. On the purge of the cooperatives, see Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 277–300.

⁵⁹ VilMA F.508, Op. 1, Vol. 3: 56, is an example among many.

⁶⁰ ERAF F.19, Op. 5, Vol. 333: 4.

Another speaker complained that only elderly people remained on the farms while the kulaks ran away to the towns. The secretary of the party committee, a hardliner, responded:

I would like to say to comrade P., that if the kulaks themselves, not we, liquidate their households, then this is not the correct approach. We should not enable them to give away the farms so easily. They should be forced to implement the plans for spring sowing, and simultaneously we should limit their exploitation of wage labour.⁶¹

From the last comment it would seem that the principal priority for the Communist Party was that kulaks should suffer—this bore out the element of class revenge that was central to the anti-kulak campaign. If the primary concern had been to end exploitation in the countryside, why should kulaks not give away their farms? The neighbourhood would get rid of the kulaks without harming them, and they would be looking for work in the towns and thereby getting closer to the Soviet ideal, the working class. Still, most local administration officials seemed to be uncomprehending rather than looking for revenge.

Simultaneously, kolkhozes were discussed at the Viljandi County conference, and the general view was that the choice to join them should be voluntary. Still, even in this early period when the kolkhozes were very few, an important concern of the Communist Party was to keep kulaks out of them.⁶² The leadership of several kolkhozes in Viljandi County had been exposed as kulaks.⁶³ Although the party cadre department had the power to appoint and control the chairmen, the local Executive Committees were blamed for having chosen the “wrong” leaders. The number of kolkhozes had increased by autumn 1948 and by that time, another way to remove the kulaks had been introduced. If kulak farms were situated next to a kolkhoz, the kulak family could be forcibly moved in order to make room for the collective farm. In this way, 13 kulak families in the Eastern Township were

⁶¹ ERAF F.19, Op. 5, Vol. 333: 5.

⁶² ERAF F.19, Op. 5, Vol. 333: 11, 13.

⁶³ Kivimaa “Eesti NSV Põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine...,” 79; Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 271–73.

moved from their farms in September 1948, leaving the land to kollektives. Some of the declared kulaks “voluntarily” relinquished their farms; others asked to receive a new farm as compensation. According to the minutes, they did receive new farmsteads.⁶⁴

3.9. From Campaign to Deportation

The campaign on the local level was finished in March 1949. On 11 March, another set of lists of kulak families were due from the township Executive Committees. These were the final ones, and especially the slowly performing townships were asked to add more names. These were confirmed in the county Executive Committee and sent to Tallinn. On the local level this could have been perceived as just another round of kulak declarations, even if the problem of what to do with the destitute and fleeing kulaks was a pressing problem for the authorities. The problem was finally solved in the deportations of 25 March 1949, known as *Operation Priboi*, which was targeting the three Baltic republics.

Preparations for the deportations of kulak families, as well as nationalists,⁶⁵ from Estonia were already being made. The decision for these deportations had been made in Moscow in January 1949, and a resolution of the local Council of Ministers was passed on 14 March 1949, and the kulak lists of the counties were attached to the resolution.⁶⁶ Agents of the security department were already at work with the earlier versions of these lists, preparing deportation documents, although at least officially the deportation plans were not known to the county and township administrations. The security agents had received quotas from Moscow, and numbers corresponding to these quotas were selected by the MGB with some haste. The selection depended on the lists prepared by the local authorities, and in cases when these were

⁶⁴ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 65: 68.

⁶⁵ “Nationalist” just like “kulak” was an accusation, not an objective category. Nationalists were regarded as enemies of the Soviet system, e.g. having had positions in independent Estonia, belonging to families of “enemies of the people” or being associated with the resisters in the woods.

⁶⁶ Rahi-Tamm and Kahar, “The deportation operation ‘Priboi’ in 1949,” 364.

changed at the last minute, the corresponding deportation lists were also to be changed. In the townships studied intensively here, it is clear that families added to the lists on 11 March were in fact deported. In particular, the Southern Township had been slow to point out kulaks and added many to the list at the last minute, and these were deported as well. (See table 3.2.) There were no names on the deportation lists for kulaks that had not already been discussed and accepted in the township and county records of these three townships.⁶⁷

Table 3.4. Deportations from the studied area in March, 1949.

Township	Deported persons	Deported as nationalists	Deported as kulaks	Not deported kulaks*
Southern	153	47	106	29%
Northern	75	17	58	56%
Eastern	181	80	101	64%
Total	409	144	265	52%

Sources: Deportations according to the database Joint Register of Estonian Population Losses and ViMA fond 599–2.

*Deportation lists contain persons, although families are normally listed together, while kulak files contain families. In the last row, families on the kulak lists, missing in the deportation lists, have been counted for the sake of comparison.

The deportations of March 1949 did not only target kulaks, although the procedure of kulak identification typifies the class struggle campaigns. The deportation files concerned both kulak families and nationalist families, the two groups were kept apart in the lists, even if they were subsequently treated in the same way. These deportations proceeded in a manner close to the familiar picture of a very secret

⁶⁷ In a previous study of Tartu County, a neighbouring county, historian Aigi Rahi found that 12 per cent of the families deported had not been on the kulak lists previously, as if they had been added at the last minute. Maybe this was the case, though it could have been due to the fact that Rahi examined only the list of March 11, whereas I have followed the process over time. Families that once had been acquitted might have been reintroduced on the lists again at the last minute, as their files were still in the township registers.

proceeding, followed by the knock on the door and arrest in the middle of the night. Kulaks comprised less than half of the numbers of those deported from Estonia generally; instead, nationalists constituted a majority on the lists.⁶⁸ The security services selected the nationalists, who were not submitted to a public campaign. In the three townships in this study however, the proportions were different, and two thirds of the deported were kulaks. This mirrors the demographic character of the area, which was chosen to include rural townships with farms as large and prosperous as farms could be in interwar Estonia.

The fact that the township lists contained very different shares of kulaks in proportion to the number of inhabitants or farms, or even larger farms reduced in the communist land reform, indicates that the quotas used by the MGB were not known to the local authorities. Some townships were working energetically in the kulak campaign and “uncovered” a great number of kulaks, whereas other townships were reluctant, thus incurring criticism from above, but still identifying proportionally fewer kulaks. Deportation lists were shorter than the kulak lists. In my region of study, less than half (44 per cent) of the families on the kulak lists were also on the deportation lists.⁶⁹ According to historian Aigi Rahi the percentage in Tartumaa was higher; here, over 70 per cent of the kulaks ended up on the deportation lists.⁷⁰ The differences are probably due to the quotas given to the security forces, but they seem to indicate that Viljandi County and townships were almost too diligent in their anti-kulak campaign.

The overfulfilment of quotas, improbable as it may seem, was far from unique for this campaign. The same phenomenon was present in Siberia in the 1930s, and in the Great Terror in the late 1930s.⁷¹ It has also been observed in areas and populations swept up by the Holocaust. The overfulfilment of plans and goals was characteristic—

⁶⁸ Rahi-Tamm and Kahar, “The deportation operation ‘Priboi’ in 1949,” 366. 41 per cent of the 7,500 families were kulaks, 59 per cent nationalists.

⁶⁹ I have compared the lists of files in the township registers in March 1949, VilMA F.599, Eastern, Southern and Northern Townships, with deportation lists from the data base compiled by Aigi Rahi-Tamm.

⁷⁰ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 39–40.

⁷¹ Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 137–39; Werth, *L’ivrogne et la marchande de fleurs*, 96–98.

almost an obsession—in the Stalin revolution generally, if we speak about economic production. That it would emerge also in this morbid context is a little more surprising. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman provides theoretical explanations for this phenomenon as the bureaucrat's wish to please, and the need to be perceived as a good worker. The responsiveness on the part of inferiors towards superiors, he argues, is an essential part of modernity.⁷²

3.10. Liquidation of the Kulaks

The local authorities played only a secondary role in the deportations as such; the MGB had assumed responsibility in the process, which was conducted on the all-Union level. Most of the executive officers had Russian names, and convoys of guards from all parts of the union were sent out to the deportation squads.⁷³ The local community was, probably correctly, not considered capable of implementing such tasks.

Those deported from Viljandi County were transported to Krasnoyarsk and Novosibirsk in southern Siberia, from where they were assigned to live in kolkhozes, sovkhoses and lumbering camps in very difficult circumstances. In many places, the deportees were not welcome, since the newcomers had to be fitted into already crowded housing. Some of them, however, later said that they were met with friendliness by the local inhabitants, since many of those living in these places had been deported themselves in the Russian campaign of 1929–32, and knew exactly how they felt.⁷⁴

Four years after the deportation, in March 1953, Stalin died. Almost at once his successors began to evacuate large portions of the prison camps, according to differing categories of prisoners. Political prisoners were the last to be released. Later, the deported were also authorised to apply for permission to leave the deportation settlements and to return to their home region. According to the official estimate, 20,000 of the 23,000 deported returned to Estonia between 1956 and

⁷² Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, xiii, 60.

⁷³ "Dokumente 1949," 1051–62.

⁷⁴ Personal communication from a victim; *Eesti elulood II*, 152.

1958.⁷⁵ To begin with, returning deportees often were not allowed to return to their home town or township for fear of conflicts, for instance about the expropriated belongings of the kulak families. But it did happen that they went back to the same village only to spend the next fifty years seeing the people who had moved into their home.

3.11. The Extent of Local Participation

In the village soviets throughout the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, unarmed civil citizens, obeying orders from above, and aided by very unsatisfactory definitions, were wreaking havoc on the lives of their neighbours. The participants in the process were physically and socially close to the victims. In the literature on mass violence of the 20th century it has often been stated that the division of labour in modern society keeps decision-makers well separated from victims, as they “write memoranda, design diagrams and talk on the phone.”⁷⁶ But on the other end there is still someone who executes orders. Often, these people were sent in from the outside, and confronted a mass of unknown faces. In the case of Soviet Estonia, the decision to launch the anti-kulak campaign was also made far from the village. But this particular procedure required that local people, neighbours and acquaintances, who knew the victims and their conditions very well, be those to carry out decisions.

This procedure seems consistent with the most important of the agreed goals for the dekulakisation and collectivisation processes in the entire Soviet Union—to subordinate the rural community to Soviet rule. Playing out the procedure of finding kulaks inside the local community inevitably created conflict and divided society. The Ural-Siberian method of social pressure and peasant self-taxation, discussed in Chapter 2, seems to have been designed to attain this goal. The whole point was that peers, not the higher levels of the Soviet apparatus, would be the actors in this conflict. Moreover, as R. W. Davis has noted, the procedure would provide a quasi-democratic framework

⁷⁵ Rahi-Tamm, “Human losses,” 39, Table 2.

⁷⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 24.

for legitimising the campaign.⁷⁷ As a consequence, local Soviet authorities would develop closer ties with the higher levels of power, and disloyal representatives of local power weeded out. It also contributed to breaking down the resistance of the peasantry towards collectivisation, since the kulaks were seen by Soviet power as instigating the resistance and influencing poorer peasants.

The system sanctioned the repression very openly, and with time the violence became routine. Those who made the decisions to begin the campaign by sending out secret orders, were not visible to the actors on the ground, they could profit from moral invisibility. This invisibility was not provided to those who executed the orders. The official campaign against the kulaks maintained that the kulaks belonged to a class apart, but the differences between them and other peasants were almost invisible. The possibility to stretch the definitions must have made everyone uncertain about who would wind up next time on the list. There were no obvious external differences between village deputies and the kulaks that were singled out. Those who participated in the process could not sleep peacefully at night, in the knowledge that they themselves did not belong to a certain group at which the persecution was aimed.

One should not, as a rule, overestimate the social cohesion of traditional villages, nevertheless, in the face of an external power, which demanded both forced deliveries and increased taxes and which spoke in another language, such cohesion did take shape and persist. Moreover, roots for and antecedents of the self-taxation process used here did not exist in independent Estonia before the Second World War. Even in earlier centuries, when these lands were provinces of the Russian empire, the *obshchina* system never had been used. The local German aristocracy had honored family rights to a certain farmstead even under serfdom in the 18th and early 19th century. The question is how these Soviet rules and methods were understood and interpreted locally. As we have seen, the procedure in the townships discussed here was a bureaucratic interpretation of the rules, using a bottom-up approach, and giving responsibility for the campaign to people already employed inside the system.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 2, page 47.

Besides the close relationship between the victims and “the others”, a recognition of the bureaucratic approach of the kulak selection process is one of the most important results of my study. The repression was not, as has sometimes been suggested, dependent on evil persons and denouncements. Instead, it was carried out through a systematic screening of the entire population with the help of records, archives and local knowledge. Since the bureaucratic system was by no means perfect or completely well functioning, there were loopholes and possibilities to hide information from the authorities. Many people lived in fear because of hidden events in their past. The method of bureaucratic screening was not insensitive to individuals’ reluctance and lack of enthusiasm in carrying out orders. Still, to the participants the repression of kulaks was presented as a task among others for the local government, something between preparations for spring sowing and the identification of large families in need of communal support. The procedures were foreseen, and of a kind with other screenings or other debts being taken care of. I have emphasized that the participants must have understood, at the latest in autumn 1948, what the campaign meant to those identified as kulaks. Still, it is not clear whether everyone faced with the task in the first place clearly saw its moral implications. This is certainly no excuse, but it might be a partial explanation for why it was possible to carry through the campaign even in this area.

These instances also show beyond doubt that the agricultural tax was only a false label used in an attempt to disguise a process of expropriation. The amounts were unreasonable and it was not even expected that they could be paid. The entire procedure, with decisions and signatures, was a farce or a parody of a judicial proceeding. Still, the question remains why so many people were involved and so much paper used to bring about what a quick decision of expropriation could have brought about in a few days. This problem has several dimensions. A large number of people participated in the expropriation of the kulaks. Each of them simply did his or her job; each wielding decrees and forms while doing so. In this way, a substantial part of the local society became involved in the process, and on top of this, the knowledge of what happened to the kulaks was spread throughout society. The story of the dekulakisation campaign told in this chapter is a different one from the horror of an unexpected knock on the door in the

middle of the night and immediate transportation to Siberia. It shows a drawn-out bureaucratic process, with many participants and numerous twists and turns. A large portion of the rural community was closely involved in it. The varnish of a judicial process, which I have insisted on throughout the narrative, was crucial for the process. Another aspect was the existence of negotiation and real, if diminishing, room for manoeuvre. This meant salvation for some of the victims, which is not unimportant. But it was simultaneously an incentive for others—authorities, activists, and victims—to engage in the process. This participation was exactly what was intended from the central level.

In Estonia, this happened in my view, for the most part reluctantly, and in some of the documents there is on the part of local actors a perceptible impression of deceiving or outwitting the system. One sign of this are the massive appeals that in a few months joined large parts of the rural communities in individualised and inefficient—but still clear—protest against the anti-kulak campaign. The broad participation of both officials and Communist Party members in the appeals is quite remarkable in the late Stalinist period. Secondly, the differing outcomes of the campaign in the townships show that certain amounts of resistance were possible inside the system, but also that they coexisted with the over-fulfilment of orders occurring elsewhere. Finally, it is obvious that local society was not entrusted with carrying out acts of state-sponsored violence such as the act of deportation.

This participation left an indelible mark on society. The openness and accompanying propaganda made participants and bystanders alike knowledgeable, tacitly involved by small actions or just by passivity. No one could maintain he did not know that a considerable proportion of the rural communities, often well known and respected families, were destroyed by economic ruin, social exclusion and political persecution, in a process that took a year and a half and ended with the total reorganisation of the Estonian countryside. No one was able to escape, even if subsequently some turned silent and others reduced their outside contacts, escaping into the privacy of the nuclear family.

This is a part of Soviet society that has been relatively unattended in post-Soviet studies. The repression was part of everyday life, also exposed for instance in the studies of the labour camps, showing that camp inmates worked side by side with ordinary workers in factories and even offices in almost every town of the Soviet Union. These char-

acteristics are important to an understanding of the everyday functioning of the system. In particular, they are crucial for comprehending how ordinary people, not convinced communists, were drawn into the process and then participated in it.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the different perceptions of the dekulakisation campaign in the Soviet Union—one that community cohesion survived the campaign, the other, more pessimistic, that the Soviet authorities largely achieved their goal of destroying the community. This close study of small rural communities in Estonia in the anti-kulak campaign, points in the pessimistic direction. Even if it is impossible to quantify the numbers of the local population who submitted or resisted, community cohesion would have been lost by spring 1949. Fear and hostility towards returning kulak families in the late 1950s, recorded in life stories, are a symptom of this.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Kirss et al., eds., *She who remembers*, 142.

Chapter 4

Inventing Kulaks

Leida B¹ was included on the list of kulaks already in the first round as kulaks were listed in September 1947. She was the sole adult of her household, a woman 34 years of age with two sons, ages 5 and 7. The farm was small, 24 hectares in all; it was not one of the older farms. Leida B called herself a settler; in her appeal against the kulak declaration she wrote that her family had earlier rented the farm, but had received full rights of usage in 1945.² The family had a sizable number of livestock: two horses, four cows, an ox, sheep and pigs. The form, which served as the primary document for justifying the kulak declaration, was called a characterisation (Est. *iseloomustus*). It contained pre-printed questions pertaining to the kulak decrees, about labour, implements, land leases etc. Since kulak declarations concerned a family and not just individuals, the family members were asked for. In addition, there was an open space where the township Executive Committee could add remarks about the political attitudes of the family, or its record in fulfilling the labour and product deliveries due to the household. This form also mentions a reaper. In addition, it stated that the family had employed a Russian prisoner of war on the farm during the

¹ The names have been changed.

² VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 688: 2.

German occupation. Day labourers also were mentioned in the part of the questionnaire that concerned labour power.³

Leida B. made her appeal to the Executive Committee of Viljandi County. She referred to the fact that she had rented the farm already for nine years, and that the communist land reform had finally made it possible for her to work for herself. In October 1947 the Executive Committee exempted her from kulak status.⁴ The Eastern Township had pointed out a large number of kulaks, but had also been criticised for not preparing the decisions properly. The case of Leida B. was sent back to the township for additional data. The new form for characterisation is not dated, but it was probably written in spring or summer 1948. It contained a number of new aspects. Firstly, Leida's husband, Hans, had been arrested earlier. This was probably a very important change. Now it was no longer the case of a simple settler family; it was a family in which the husband had been arrested for crimes against the new regime. This meant they were not categorized as presumptive supporters, but as enemies. Additionally, it turned out that the farm Leida's husband had rented was an old farm of larger size, 60 hectares. Included were data formally needed for the kulak accusation—the information about the Russian POW and a few day labourers, with their names.⁵ When the county Executive Committee changed its decision in July 1948 and reinstated the family of Leida B. in the kulak register, these were the facts that they referred to, not the arrest of her husband.⁶ Who supplied these additional data? It might have been the work of the security forces, but it is probable that such recent events were well known in the local community.

Leida B. appealed a second time to the Council of Ministers. She referred to friendly relations with the POW, a statement supported by another POW who had been working on the neighbouring farm. After the liberation of the Germans, she had not used external labour except for a few days in the high season, she maintained. Her emphasis, however, was on her belonging to the working people, the masses who were to benefit from Soviet rule. She wrote: "I come from a poor

³ VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 688: 1.

⁴ VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 688: 3.

⁵ VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 688: 4.

⁶ VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 688: 5.

peasant family; I worked as a maid until the age of 23, and at that point I married a tenant farmer. Now I am a settler and my parents are settlers too.”⁷ This appeal was discussed when the representatives of the Council of Ministers visited Viljandi County on September 14–17, 1948. Her appeal was refused, on the grounds of her having employed the referenced POW and day labourers.

Leida B. made another try in December 1948, writing a letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in ESSR, asking to be liberated from kulak status. In this letter she mentioned her husband, who was in a prison camp in Harku, just outside Tallinn. She explains in the letter that she and her husband had received one half of the farm in the communist land reform, while her mother had received the other half, cultivating it together with Leida’s brother and sister.⁸ Actually, it seemed as if the family had been able to circumvent the land reform to some extent. Can the Land Commission have committed a mistake when it distributed the farm within the family? Perhaps the Land Commission just did not care about the ideological consequences; they wanted to show results. There are no signs that anyone doubted the family’s rights to access the entire farm in this arrangement.

The Presidium discussed her letter in January 1949, and confirmed the decision that Leida B. was to be considered a kulak. Three months later Leida and her two small sons were deported to Vengerovo in Novosibirsk oblast in Siberia.⁹

Why did this happen to her? Who were the people who ended up on the kulak lists in this weird procedure? Part of the argument in the case of Leida B. concerns whether she was a poor girl who received land in the Soviet land reform, or whether, on the contrary, she was the wife of a wealthy farmer on an old farm. If the latter, there must also be a hidden agenda at play, an agenda that would have more to do with the meaning, rather than the precise content, of the slogans and catch-phrases of class struggle. In such a case, kulaks were punished for what they had been, but no longer were.¹⁰

⁷ VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 688: 6.

⁸ VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 688: 9.

⁹ Data base of population losses, Department of history, University of Tartu.

¹⁰ The accused are called kulaks in my text. This means that they appeared on the kulak lists and were obliged to pay kulak taxes.

The issue of the Russian prisoner of war in these documents points to the aftermath of the war and the revenge taken on those who helped the Germans—this is surely part of the story. To use POWs as labour power was a crime against the Geneva Convention defining the rights of prisoners, and in addition was an insult against the Red Army. Another reason to select her might have been that she was considered to belong among the political enemies of the Soviet system. Her arrested husband, emerging in the second round of deliberations on her status, might indicate this. Strictly speaking, political enemies were the concern of the security forces—they were singled out as nationalists or bandits. The local authorities selected only kulaks, and only for them were the motives for deportation disclosed. To what extent did the local authorities distinguish between class and political orientation?

Finally, at the moment of her being declared a kulak, Leida B. was a single woman with small children. A possible principle guiding selection of kulaks could have been to minimize damage to agricultural work; hence, a priority for getting rid of households consisting of old people and female heads of households with a shortage of labour power. As there was a general lack of able-bodied men after the war in the area, single mothers might have been a rather common phenomenon. Were kulak households in general different from the households we can find in the kolkhozes?

Moreover, the example shows how the selection process was argued in a negotiation over class definitions and political preferences. For instance, it is noteworthy that Leida's arrested husband was not mentioned in the first round; apparently he was considered irrelevant. There is no doubt about the imbalance in power relations in this argumentation, but like other kulaks, Leida B. did not accept the accusations silently; on the contrary, she fought against them as long as she was able.

4.1. The Process

This chapter is devoted to the process in which kulak status was negotiated and defined at the local level. This negotiation formed the backdrop of the final selection of kulak households. Through the process we can better understand why certain families were chosen, and

simultaneously obtain insights into the stereotypes and conventions, as well as to the limits of the freedom of action that the actors had in the process. Interesting in this case is that the negotiation involved not only the differing levels of Soviet power—the party, the Supreme Soviet and the various levels of local councils, and the security system, but also the kulaks themselves, who appealed against the decision to declare them kulaks, and also the population at large, which participated by supporting the claims of the kulaks in numerous letters of defence and affidavits. This did not mean of course that these negotiations were conducted under conditions of freedom of speech or with equal rights for the prosecutors and the victims, but such broad, large-scale participation in the process seems significant in itself. As it was framed as a campaign of class struggle, the intention with the openness of the campaign obviously was that the population was to participate with accusations on the side of the local and central authorities and the Communist Party. However, at least in this case it turned out differently, with many people engaging on the side of the accused, thus defying the authorities, but in the process they also obtained new experiences of the Soviet system.

Secondly, the negotiation is interesting because it refers to a construction of a legal system different from that of bourgeois society, a proletarian legality taking much consideration of the class character of both judges and the defendants, but also making formalities important, and written documents instrumental. The legal framework of the negotiation thus was important and will be presented at some length. The ambition of constructing legality seems to me to hold the key to some incongruities of Soviet society that still puzzle researchers. The existence of a broad-based process in Estonia has been regarded as a deviance from the Soviet norm; later, Soviet leaders maintained that the “legalism” guiding the Estonian leadership showed its own liberal stance and was part of the reason why they were later punished.¹¹ The existence of an organised round of complaints and revisions of kulak decisions in early 1930 in the Soviet Union, described by historian Stephan Merl, instead suggests that such legalistic ambitions existed

¹¹ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikums*, 396. Feest pointed out the work of Merl to me, for which I owe him thanks.

more generally, although in characteristically more tumultuous forms in the campaign of 1929–32, in the early days of Stalinism.¹²

In any case, the negotiation in the late 1940s in Soviet Estonia was interesting since it very clearly showed the values and the limits of the Stalinist society of the time. These limits were constituted by the decree about kulak taxes, decided centrally. But the framework also included a broader rhetoric of class struggle and the question of friends and enemies of the Soviet state, one that is common in all documents produced at the time. The arguments had been tested already during the Soviet collectivisation campaign in 1929–32, and this was part of the framework as well.

The outcome of the negotiation will also be analysed here through an examination of statistics on social differentiation, and gender and family composition of the kulaks in the studied area. In the process, the kulak families will be compared to the rest of the population. The social and economical indicators of kulak families in the Baltic Soviet republics, in particular the prevalence of old people and women and children, have been studied previously. Will the three townships in the local study change the generally held picture? Will new political and historical aspects, detected in close reading of the local documents, change the general picture available in the history books in the Baltic countries today?

4.2. The Voices of Kulaks

The archival materials from the Soviet period mirror the top-down information system that characterised Soviet state and society; not much room is given to the voices of ordinary people. Much of Soviet history has therefore been confined to an analysis of the top layers of the power system, the place where decisions were made; in contrast, developments on the local level have often remained in the shadow of the dramaturgy of the Kremlin. This is of course not satisfactory, as we in democratic countries take care to make a difference between decisions and intentions on the one hand, and implementation and consequences on the

¹² Merl, *Bauern unter Stalin*, 82–91.

other. These phenomena can differ widely, and the unintended consequences of policies are a fascinating object of study, in danger of disappearing from sight when only top-down orders are available.

Alternatives like private letters and letters to daily newspapers were censored, and more importantly, submitted to self-censorship. Diaries have lately been used intensively in research into everyday life in the Soviet Union and Soviet subjectivity.¹³ When ordinary people, whose life-worlds we are trying to understand, write such sources, we usually find expressions and concepts emanating from the ideological framework of communist society. There are fragments of Marxist theories, rhetoric of class struggle, categories and definitions that have been incorporated even by the sceptics or oppositional groups.

The appeals written by the accused kulaks belong to this kind of source materials. They are formulated by the kulaks themselves or someone they had asked to perform this act, but they are full of stereotypical expressions and arguments defined by the decrees about kulaks and the entire campaign surrounding these decrees. It is therefore just as important to attempt to define the framework of the argumentation about kulak status as to follow the argumentation itself. The kulaks were showing their insubordination by not passively submitting to the assault but, instead, negotiating to the fullest possible extent, often taking recourse to several levels of appeals.

The obvious framework was the decree "Taxation of peasant households in the Estonian SSR" from 30 August 1947, followed by the explication of how it should be implemented in a circular to the Executive Committees on the county level, "The singling out of kulak households in the Estonian SSR" from 27 September 1947, under paragraph 2.¹⁴ Kulak households were defined as those using wage labour or labour external to the family openly or in secret, receiving income not earned by labour from machinery or processing of produce, those leasing out land "in conditions of usury", or those engaged in trading activities.¹⁵

¹³ Figes, *The Whisperers*; Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, works by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Lynne Viola.

¹⁴ These have been published in Tõnurist, *Eesti NSV põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine*, 228–35, 265–68.

¹⁵ See Chapter 1, page 14 above for a more exact formulation.

There were at least three other criteria in a hidden agenda, that is, arguments that were not based on the decree on kulak taxes, but still were used by both the administration and the kulaks, who seemingly were in agreement of their validity. The wealth, and in particular, the size of the farm that had been owned by the peasant family before the land reform was important. For all practical purposes, the political views of the peasants were taken into account. But most important was whether the kulak family had had links to the Germans during the occupation. These additional criteria were present in the public debate, and they were evoked when applicable, actually more often than the official criteria.

These specifications of forbidden acts and views constituted the framework of the discussion. When the kulaks negotiated their status this framework was never questioned. They might have held other views and expressed their thoughts inside the family or among friends, but the public contestation was limited by the existing framework. The appealing families often argued that their farms had been large, measured in hectares, but had been giving meagre yields. Or, they said, the family had leased the farm, not owned it. People outside the family living on the farm were not labourers, but relatives or foster children. If they had been employed, this had happened while somebody else was the owner, and that was not the responsibility of the present owner. They often referred to their parents who earlier had managed the farm. They had owned farm machinery, but this was old, degraded and in fact impossible to use, so the family could not have earned anything from leasing them out. This was the obvious defence, and it was not very important what was in fact true or not—important was what worked as a defence.

4.3. The Appeals

The kulaks themselves did not always write the appeals. There are beautifully written letters signed with a shaky and obviously untrained hand. There is no way of knowing for certain who wrote them, but we can guess that it may have been schoolteachers, agronomists, clergy or other educated villagers. It seems probable that some writers helped several families in the same area since the same arguments were used in many different letters. There seems also to have been communication between villagers about which arguments were the most effective.

In most cases, the appeals included letters written in support of the accused family. The letters were written by neighbours and relatives under their own names, certifying that the facts evoked by the accused kulaks were correct. The village deputies, charged with control of the family, wrote these letters of support surprisingly often.¹⁶ Party members presented themselves with the number of their party membership book, and their distinctions and medals when they wrote in favour of a kulak family.¹⁷ There is even a letter of support in which the writer presents himself as an employee of SARK, the security service.¹⁸ In one case, a letter of support was signed by each member of an entire kolkhoz.¹⁹

People who in the accusation were alleged to be employed by the kulak family wrote another kind of letter of support. They explained that their work had been part of an agreed exchange of labour, or that they spent the summer with their relatives on the farm, or maybe rented rooms on the farm, without working there. There were also letters from Russian prisoners of war, which in a few cases had even been sent from the filtration camps in remote areas of Russia. Those who wrote these letters typically testified that the accused kulak family had saved them from the terrible conditions of a German camp and probably also saved their lives.²⁰ Just the fact that they had still kept in contact with the family four years after the end of the war bears witness to a good relationship.

The letters of support are significant in this context. It must have been apparent for the letter writers that it could be dangerous to support an accused kulak family in the midst of the worst terror campaign during Stalinist times in the Baltics. The proof that also at the time these letters were seen as significant is that all of them were meticulously saved and filed, so that they still can be accessed today. At any time anyone from the security services, from the special sector of the Communist Party in charge of controlling people appointed to *nomenklatura* posts, or the local soviets could look into the kulak files to see who had written what, and point his or her finger toward those who

¹⁶ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 697.

¹⁷ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 292 for instance.

¹⁸ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 126.

¹⁹ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 297.

²⁰ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 714; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 740 for instance.

had supported the socially dangerous elements. Still, large numbers of such letters were written, so that as many as eight and even ten letters supported a single appeal.

In contrast to all these letters of support, only very few letters of denouncement are found in the kulak files. In the more than two hundred kulak files perused in this study, only six denouncements were found. This is noteworthy, since denouncements have been thought of as a characteristic of Soviet society and the participation of ordinary citizens in the struggles in that society. This does not necessarily mean that denouncements were few over all, since much of what was said in meetings was not necessarily recorded in the minutes. But the small number of written denouncements, as compared to the massive number of letters of support, still point to a lack of willing participants.

If letters of support are to be considered as a form of tacit or passive resistance, this resistance was not directed against the regime in general. Each such letter constituted a protest against a given decision regarding one specific family. It could even be maintained that this was its specific character, not to be a protest against the singling out of kulak families or the anti-kulak campaign in general, but against a specific and erroneous singling out of one kulak family. When practically every kulak family was able to get such support, the mass character of the protest becomes obvious, though no individual letter writer could be accused of opposing the policies of the Soviet government. Nevertheless, this essentially massive protest was embarrassing, and the party and political leadership obviously understood it as a questioning of the whole campaign against the kulaks. In 1947 and 1948, officials repeatedly received orders not to write letters in support of kulaks. A circular from the Viljandi county Executive Committee issued in December 1947 reads as follows:

Simultaneously it is emphasised that it is categorically forbidden for the Executive Committees or village soviets to issue any kind of certificates and testimonies, which are not envisaged in the decrees, to kulak households.²¹

²¹ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 82: 42.

Some officials doing precisely this were named and accused of maintaining a liberal stance towards the kulaks. With such threats, the administration tried to close ranks among those who held posts in the *nomenklatura*.

4.4. Retroactive Soviet Law

When the negotiations over individual kulaks were going on, one of the preconditions was that all inhabitants of Estonia ought to have understood that Soviet annexation in August 1940 was the valid frame of reference for the subsequent German occupation in 1941–1944. Everyone was expected to have overlooked the fact that Soviet power had been enforced, short-lived and rapidly vanquished by the Nazi army, and have held the view that the Soviet Union would emerge victorious from the war, return to the areas it recently had conquered, and that consequently, Soviet legislation was what people in Estonia ought to comply with. No one else—not even Stalin—had known these things, but the villagers in Viljandi County were expected to act as if they had.

This must have been the explanation for sentences handed down against people for having used external labour power during the German occupation, and this was likely also the reason why the relationship between kulaks and settlers was discussed in the kulak declarations. The Soviet land reform had begun in 1940–41, and a number of settlers had received land from larger farms. At the beginning of the German occupation, the land reform was declared invalid, and farmers were encouraged to get rid of the settlers and take back their land. According to testimonies they also were encouraged to take seeds, cattle and implements from the settlers.

Upon the second Soviet conquest, those who had mistreated settlers on their land were accused or scolded on account of their behaviour. The implication was that they ought to have obeyed Soviet law, in spite of the fact that the German occupation force had annulled it. Legally, the argument rested on the lawfulness of Soviet annexation, maintained by the Soviet Union after the war; admittedly, this view has certain logic. But the question of how to behave while under German occupation did not constitute a moral choice for the population at

large—it was a political choice involving essentially insight into future events. Even those who were opposed to the German occupation would accept the offers of the German administration to return to the status quo of 1939, with its authoritarian but generally accepted rules. In an unclear situation such as this, it was not that the people lacked a moral compass; they were simply faced with impossible choices.

An example from the archives illustrates these points. August J. in the Southern Township was accused of having exploited a female farmhand. His appeal enclosed a letter from the woman in question, explaining the situation. She was not employed by August J., she wrote, but was a settler who had received part of his land in the land reform of 1940. As she was single and had small children, she was unable to farm the land she had been given. She had wanted to return the land, but had not been allowed to do so. Instead, August J. had helped her and worked the land, while simultaneously supporting her.²² The impression left is that August J. had acted with utmost solicitude toward the woman. During the German occupation he did not get back his ownership rights, but was allowed to use all the land he had owned before the Soviet land reform, and was encouraged to remove the settler family from his land. If the letter is correct, he had abstained from doing this. This single mother had given back the land for him to cultivate, but he had in addition taken care of her and her children.

In the first round of kulak negotiations August J. was exempted from kulak taxes. Later, his case was reconsidered, and characterized with the stereotypical phrase: “Additional information has made it clear that the household made use of external labour.”²³ August J. escaped deportation, probably since he was hiding, though his sister, who was living with him, was deported. The harsh verdict against the two of them was handed down even though August, according to his personal file, had done as much as he was able to help the settler.

Others were accused of maltreating both settlers and farmhands during the German occupation.²⁴ Andres L., for instance, was accused

²² VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 134.

²³ “Täiendavalt on selgunud et majapidamine kasutas võõrast tööjõudu.”

²⁴ VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 130; VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 154; VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 292; VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 741; VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 762.

of having been the local agricultural official under the Germans, of having requisitioned horses from the peasants and of having been armed when touring the neighbourhood. He was also accused of taking settlers' grain and giving it to the Germans.²⁵ It is surprising that such arguments were not more common.

4.5. Negotiations Concerning Exploitation

Ostensibly, the kulak negotiation was about class in a Marxist sense, and the kulaks were supposed to be exploiters of the labour of the landless rural population. Leida B., like many other kulaks in the area, was living alone with her children, and obviously, single women and elderly people were more in need of external farmhands and daily labourers. There was a provision for such needs in the kulak decree, but it was up to the local authorities to interpret and implement the decree. In the three townships examined in this study, differences between the provisions of the decree and its local implementation can be discerned. In the Southern Township relatively fewer women-led households were declared kulak, which probably was the result of attention paid to the provisions. In the Eastern Township, on the other hand, the need for women to find external labourers could serve as a pretext to accuse them.

The accused often maintained that they were in need of extra farmhands as either due to advanced age or illness they were unable to work. Asta M., age 35, wrote for instance that she was living on a farm with her mother, aged 61, who was unable to work due to illness. Thus, Asta M. argued, the household was compelled to use wage labour. A number of villagers supported Asta's appeal and certified the mother's inability to work. Asta was acquitted from kulak status for some time, and escaped deportation, but later her case was reconsidered and she was again included in the kulak lists.²⁶ Kadri L., age 71

²⁵ VilMA F599, Op. 2, Vol. 116.

²⁶ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 269. These cases have not been followed individually, but in general, the kulaks singled out after the end of March 1949 were not deported, only submitted to the general persecution and exclusion given to all kulaks.

and living alone, also made an appeal, referring to her age as justifying her help in running her farm. This was, however, refused her.²⁷ She remained on the kulak list, but escaped deportation.

Another case concerned a family, which employed a girl to help out in the household since the wife worked for an industrial plant in town. Helmi K., the wife, wrote in her appeal: "The authorities seem to think that I am afraid of work since I do not work on the farm and a girl is helping me at home. But the Executive Committee of the county has assigned me to work in the industrial plant!" Initially, the family was liberated from kulak taxes on these grounds. Somewhat later, however, a letter of denouncement appeared. According to the letter-writer, Helmi used to drive around in a car with Karl-Siegmund Litzmann, the Nazi commissioner of occupied Estonia in 1941–44, as his translator. Moreover, her husband, Juhan K., had formed a kolkhoz. When it was time to plant the potatoes, he had been brewing moonshine, and all the kolkhoz members had become drunk and the planting was delayed. The husband responded that he should be viewed favourably, since he was the first to create a kolkhoz in the neighbourhood, and nineteen members of the kolkhoz certified that they wanted to keep him there. The employer of the wife also wrote to verify that she was needed at work. These objections notwithstanding, the appeal of the family was turned down in autumn 1948, whereupon Helmi and her family were again included in the kulak list.²⁸

These cases demonstrate that the ability to work seems to have been a secondary factor in kulak declarations. Sometimes it was taken into consideration, but it could just as well be brushed aside without comment. Accusations for collaboration with the Germans, on the other hand, were more powerful than pro-Soviet deeds and circumstances, such as creating a kolkhoz and or having the support of the kolkhoz members.

An additional aspect of the deliberations remains to be considered, even if that may seem cynical. Local authorities might have been thinking about the productive capabilities of households, and for economic reasons they may have tried to avoid kulak declarations of fami-

²⁷ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 127.

²⁸ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 297.

lies with many able-bodied, working members. In this way, the productive forces of the township could be preserved. To some extent, the same rationale can also be used to understand the high proportion of elderly people among the victims. Like single women, elderly people had a need for external farmhands and were therefore more exposed to the hunt for kulaks, unless special consideration was made for their age and working capacity. If local leaders were concerned about productivity, elderly people were an obvious choice, preferable to families in which many members were of working age.

This argument, however, is inconsistent with the real behaviour of local leaders in the three townships. When many elderly households ended up on the kulak lists of the Eastern Township, it does not seem as if productive concerns were on the minds of the local committee, instead, the inclusion of elderly households might be interpreted as a propensity to accuse weaker families in general. This possible explanation does not really fit the selection patterns in either the vindictive Eastern Township or the reluctant Southern Township.

4.6. Negotiations Concerning Prisoners of War

A frequent accusation against the kulaks was that they had used Red Army prisoners of war as farmhands during the German occupation. This accusation had both economic and political implications. Economically, it meant that a representative of the eventually victorious army had been exploited through unpaid labour. It also meant international law had been violated, since prisoners of war were not supposed to work for their captors. But actually the prisoners of war saved the formal agenda of the Soviet strategy of class struggle, according to which the kulaks were supposed to be exploiters of external labour. Apart from the labour of the Red Army POWs, other sources of wage labour were employed by very few people on their farms. This can be demonstrated with pre-war figures from the Estonian statistical services. Only 13 per cent of the farmers of Viljandi county used permanent labourers, and about a fifth had used seasonal labourers at sowing or harvest time. If we consider only the households being accused as kulaks, the share was higher—one third had used at least one permanent farmhand and two-thirds had used seasonal

labour during the peak agricultural seasons. Still, this also means that two thirds *did not* use permanent labour and one third of the kulaks *never* had used external labour on their farms, and thus hardly could be called exploiters in the pre-war period.²⁹ During the war, there was more need for labour power than earlier since many young men had left the area, having been recruited either to the Red Army or the Waffen-SS. A number of young men were also hiding in the forest to escape army mobilisation, though the numbers of these are not known. Near the town Viljandi, Red Army soldiers were held in a prison camp during the German occupation. Many households were reduced to women and children, or women, children and elderly people. The Germans leased out prisoners of war to help out in agriculture. The case of Leida B. was an example of a household accused of exploiting prisoners of war.

The prisoners of war also represented a clearly political charge. They were the prisoners of the Nazis, and there was a rumour that only people having good relations with the Nazis had access to this labour power.³⁰ A prisoner of war in the household thus could be used to show that the family had been close to the main enemy, the Germans. The accused were aware of this charge, so when they appealed, they normally wrote that the prisoner of war had come to their farm because he had fled from another unknown farm, where he had been mistreated. The appealing family, on the other hand, had taken care of the prisoner out of human compassion.

Moreover, the prisoners of war were the representatives of the victorious Red Army, and to use them as farmhands could be considered an insult against the army itself. Historian Amir Weiner has emphasised the role of the Great Patriotic War as master narrative in the USSR, and the Red Army in particular was used as the primary sign of the might of the Soviet state, and that it had huge symbolic power. It replaced the myth of the victorious revolution, which had become rather threadbare during the 1930s. The war and the victorious Red Army became the new myth, a legitimising myth, representing what should be held high in the Soviet state.³¹

²⁹ See Appendix I, Table I.6.

³⁰ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 267.

³¹ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 8.

However, such economic, political and symbolic arguments were far from the everyday life of the meagre and wretched prisoners of war. They had not had an easy time when fighting, as they lacked good clothes and nutritional food. In the prisoner of war camps the situation grew even worse, as the Germans treated them very badly. The Red Army prisoners suffered most from the German occupation of Estonia; they constituted the largest group of dead from the occupation, according to the official historical study made in Estonia after independence was re-established in 1991.³² An accused kulak wrote:

The prisoner of war came from the prisoner camp of Viljandi. In this camp, the conditions were inhuman, and the number of deaths due to hunger was enormous. I witnessed how some twenty prisoners of war were dragging their comrades who had died from hunger through the city to a grave that had been dug out somewhere at the foot of Mustamägi. It was a terrible sight, these living shadows dragging the fearsome cart; they were almost like skeletons themselves. A woman tried to give bread to one of the prisoners out of compassion. The guards hit her with the butts of their guns and arrested her.³³

The paradox thus was that the prisoners of war themselves might have considered the possibility to come to a farm and work and to have good food and a decent bed to sleep in, a privilege. In their appeals the kulaks often admitted that they had housed a prisoner of war for some time. In connection to this, they would write that the prisoner had been like a member of the family; he had sat at the same table and ate the same food as the family, and that they had been the best of friends.³⁴ In some cases, they also told how they had helped the prisoner escape prior to the return of the Red Army.³⁵ Enclosed in

³² *Estonia 1940–44*, 2005, 753.

³³ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 745.

³⁴ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 690 or 696.

³⁵ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 697, who also was able to certify that he had not used the prisoners of war as labour power, but only let them hide from the Germans. The appeal was refused.

the appeal of Leida B. is a letter from a Russian prisoner of war who remained in Estonia that touches upon his working conditions:

I would like to testify [...] that I was working near Matsi farm [the farm of Leida B.] at the time of the German occupation, where I often worked for Leida B. I can say that as a matron she was nice to her prisoner of war S.B. [living at the Matsi farm], compared to other farmers. She gave him enough to eat and at the table of the family. 30 October 1947, A.K.³⁶

Soviet prisoners of war who remained in the German camp as the Red Army approached were simply shot by the retreating German army. A monument dedicated to them still stands on the hill outside Viljandi, where the camp was located. Those who worked on farms escaped this fate. The POWs who escaped in the subsequent general confusion, or who remained with their Estonian hosts, later ended up in filtration camps in the Soviet Union, and many of them were forced to stay in camp several years. The Soviet prisoners of war in Ukraine who had been in German custody went through a similar process; they were considered suspect since they had been captured instead of fighting to the last drop of blood.³⁷

There seems thus to have been contradictory messages about the prisoners of war. Estonian peasants were punished for dealing with them disrespectfully, though the Soviet Union showed them still less respect and made them pay even more for their difficult war years. The prisoners of war themselves could regard work on Estonian farms as an improvement, at least when they were well treated there, and in any case, life on the farms was preferable to the risk of being killed in the camp by the retreating Germans. The prisoner of war issue on the grassroots level was thus contradictory, lacking black-and-white moral messages. Still, it became the crucial criterion for most kulaks when the hunt for them was going on in 1947–48.

There was also a change over time in the negotiations over this indicator. When the Executive Committee of Viljandi County dis-

³⁶ In the quotation, spelling errors have been corrected and the names have been changed. VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 688: 7.

³⁷ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 161.

cussed the first round of appeals in October 1947, the use of prisoners of war was not considered a crucial proof of kulak status. Families were liberated from kulak status with the explanation that: "... it has been shown that they took care of a Russian prisoner of war during the German occupation out of human compassion, and they treated him well."³⁸ That accused kulaks had displayed human compassion was used several times as an argument for their release. When the Council of Ministers came to Viljandi and held its first "kulak court" in November 1947, this argument was not generally accepted. But this was not the end of the discussion about this criterion for kulak declarations. When the Council of Ministers visited Viljandi the second time in September 1948, two cases of exploitation of prisoners of war were discussed. In one case it was maintained that the prisoner of war had only been used "during a short period of time" and there was no additional evidence.³⁹ This time, the county Executive Committee did not decide, but referred the case to the Council of Ministers, where the appeal was declined, and this decision was used as a precedent in further meetings. There were no more acquittals on this particular ground, even if parallel cases were presented later.⁴⁰ Thus, in practice, things changed for the worse over time.

Another case at the same meeting concerned a woman who had the attenuating circumstance of having had a son in the Red Army from 1941–1946. The exploitation of a prisoner of war and a wage labourer known by name were balanced against the son's service in the Red Army. Apparently, it was not clear which argument was most important, since this case was referred to the Council of Ministers for a decision.⁴¹ The Council of Ministers turned down her appeal, and the head of household, a woman in her sixties, was later deported. Even her son who had served in the Red Army was on the deportation list, but the deportation squad did not find him.⁴² The merits of Red Army

³⁸ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 81: 205.

³⁹ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A: 99.

⁴⁰ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A: 100, September 1948.

⁴¹ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A: 106.

⁴² VilMA F.136, Op. 1, Vol. 176: 5; VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A 106; VilMa F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 160.

service consequently was less important than the fact that a Red Army prisoner of war had been employed during the German occupation.

Finally, the special correspondent of the Council of Ministers used as late as February 1949 language reminiscent of the human compassion argument. A kulak family was released after appeal on this argument, despite the fact that two prisoners of war had been living on the farm during the German occupation, "...the intention had not been to exploit their labour power, since the farm was small and the family labour force was sufficient."⁴³

The family was referred to the list of "acquitted kulak families" and was able to live on peacefully. The main view in regards to the use of prisoner of war labour after spring 1948 still was that it was sufficient indication for a family to be declared kulak. Some of the other families liberated with reference to human compassion for prisoners of war were put on trial again in spring 1948.⁴⁴ Others had been released and never reappeared on the lists.⁴⁵ The argument, however, was not much used again, so it seems apparent that the Executive Committee of Viljandi County had made an interpretation that was considered too liberal or that it had not paid enough respect to the Red Army.

4.7. The Political Criteria

Accusations for having used Red Army prisoners of war had both economic and political implications. Another aspect of the negotiations concerned purely political matters—the views held by the family and most often the husband in the family. These will be discussed below, firstly, political preferences shown during the inter-war period and even earlier; secondly, political preferences in the war years and collaboration during the German occupation, when such took place; and finally, attitudes held towards Soviet power. Since these discussions almost exclusively concerned the husbands (even though a kulak declaration applied to the entire family), the question of other family members and

⁴³ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A. 22 February 1949.

⁴⁴ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 258; F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 782.

⁴⁵ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 276.

their possibilities for participating in the negotiations will be scrutinised separately.

4.7.1. PRE-WAR POLITICAL ATTITUDES.

Different kinds of political preferences were very often referred to in the forms characterising kulak families in the family files. Alleged bourgeois or conservative political views manifested in the period of independence in the inter-war years, or even earlier during tsarist times, were considered as a kind of deviation. In the previous wave of deportations in 1941, this had been a primary criterion; those belonging to “counterrevolutionary parties and White Guard organisations” were to be picked out for deportation.⁴⁶ The general hunt for enemies in 1947 brought up these categories once again. The following notes included in the family files are examples of such accusations: “her husband was an important leader in the Lapua movement in Estonia during the bourgeois regime,”⁴⁷ or “belonged to *Isamaaliit* during the bourgeois period.”⁴⁸ Sometimes in even more detail: “K. S. belonged to the township leaders during three years. In 1935–36 he was, in addition, a member of the board of the local consumer cooperative.”⁴⁹

Some notes had a more powerful historical resonance: “J. K. was an estate manager of prince Obolensky before 1917 and came to Estonia in 1924, since he inherited a farm here.”⁵⁰ With this statement, the kulak was indirectly, though quite clearly linked to the enemies of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Another historical event was evoked by this message: “J. L. was a traitor to the cause of the working class already in 1905. He made a list of the insurgent workers and handed it over to the punitive expeditions.”⁵¹ In the revolution of 1905 there was fierce resistance against the tsarist regime and even more so against the Baltic

⁴⁶ Ant, *Eesti* 1939–41, 167.

⁴⁷ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 125. The Lapua movement, which was of Finnish origin, was on the extreme right and was characterised as protofascist.

⁴⁸ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 113. *Isamaaliit* was a patriotic movement supporting authoritarian rule in Estonia at the end of the 1930s.

⁴⁹ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 156.

⁵⁰ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 137.

⁵¹ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 121.

German aristocracy, particularly in the province of Livland, to which Viljandi County then belonged. The tsarist regime responded with expeditions of tsarist troops sent to restore order; punishments were harsh, and it took revenge another 44 years to be executed.

Political accusations with such a long history only surfaced in the Southern Township, and they were typically directed against kulaks who were accused at a late stage, in March 1949. As the Southern Township had earlier been accused of being too liberal towards kulaks, this might have been an attempt to compensate and meet expectations. Political accusations of this kind were not used in the Northern and Eastern Townships.

4.7.2. COLLABORATION AND POLITICS DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

A second type of political accusation was over collaboration with the German occupiers in 1941–44. It was much more frequent than historical references and was used in all three townships. This involves assistance to forces attacking the Soviet Union and to its main enemies in the Great Patriotic War—that is, the losers of the war. Purges of collaborators had taken place directly after the Soviet conquest of the area in 1944. The same procedure was followed over the entire area that had been controlled by the Nazis during the war, and thus had not been exclusively carried out in the Baltic republics. Commissions to investigate war crimes committed during the Nazi occupation were formed already in September 1944, before all of Estonian territory had been re-conquered.⁵² The commissions set up a large number of local committees, down to township levels. Besides these hundreds of local committees, larger show-case trials, held in Riga, were meant to correspond to the Nuremberg trials in the West.⁵³ On the local level, a troika consisting of the local party secretary, the chairman of the Executive Committee and the local head of security usually made

⁵² Kangeris, “The former Soviet Union, Fascism and the Baltic question,” 746–48.

⁵³ Kangeris, “The former Soviet Union, Fascism and the Baltic question,” 742–45. Similar show-case trials were set up in several Russian towns as well.

decisions concerning arrests. They were in charge of the investigation of the damage done to the region by the war, Nazi repressions and in particular of the actions of the *Omakaitse*, the Estonian home guard organisation under the German occupation, and to some extent of the actions of the *Omavalitsus*, the nominal central and local administration made up of ethnic Estonians. The latter however lost most of its power in the last years of the occupation and primarily carried out German orders on the local level, for instance, in the distribution of ration coupons.⁵⁴ Collaborators were punished. Recent calculations set the number of those arrested in Estonia at about 10,000, yet these repressions have received minimal investigation over the past twenty years.⁵⁵ They were sent to camps where many of them perished. My material seems to make a difference between two groups. First, were those who according to the categorisation of the time had “blood on their hands”, that is, were accused of killing or arresting communists, communist sympathisers or soldiers of the Red Army or Jews, normally in that order. These were also called “henchmen of the Nazis”; they were arrested or even shot, and their families were immediately expelled from their homes and their property was expropriated. The second category were the “enemies of the people”—people who had belonged to organisations set up by the Germans, but who had not been directly accused of violent acts. They were also arrested, but their families were entitled to keep seven hectares of land and one cow for their sustenance. But these differences are not clear, and the epithet “enemy of the people” was used often in an attempt to persuade, rather than create a legal definition. Those who were accused of collaboration with the Germans during the dekulakisation campaign in 1947–49 had escaped the first purges.

An example of accusations in the characterisation form is the following:

Andres K. was the responsible agricultural official in the township during occupation. He belonged to the *Omakaitse* and carried a gun. M. was hiding in the forest to escape the Germans, and

⁵⁴ Myllyniemi, *Die Neuordnung der Baltischen Länder*, 117.

⁵⁵ Rahi-Tamm, “Küüditamised Eestis,” 21.

[Andres K.] took M.'s horse. He delivered the grain of the settlers to the German authorities.⁵⁶

Andres K. seems to be an obvious case of a so-called enemy of the people, someone who was not accused of having "blood on his hands". Still, he was in charge of his own farm in March 1949 and was not included in the kulak list until the last moment. The accusations against Juhan N. were even stronger:

1941, he joined the home guard *Omakaitse* and treated people very badly. He participated in the arrests of Soviet citizens in 1941.⁵⁷

In the arguments they made in their appeals, kulaks also made reference to events during the German occupation. An often-recurring theme was that of a common enemy and shared circumstances—the Germans and the German occupation—against which they had themselves resisted, or had helped those who resisted. Estonians are not well known for their active resistance against the Nazis, as opposed to Poles or Lithuanians.⁵⁸ Still, there were people hiding in the forest in order to escape German mobilisation, and in the source material they were called forest brethren. As later historians have called the resisters against Soviet rule the "forest brotherhood", this seems a little confusing.⁵⁹ We have to accept an ambiguity here; people used the concept of "forest brothers" for those sharing their sympathies, while resisters on the opposing side were called bandits.

Having resisted against the Germans was often used as an argument against being labelled a kulak; the Soviets in their propaganda maintained that the resistance movement had been large and powerful, and thus many considered that their claim to have belonged to it would be believed. This propaganda picture was codified in several ways; one was to give names to various resisting groups. The kulaks thus relied upon a current heroic myth when they used support for the resistance

⁵⁶ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 116.

⁵⁷ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 719.

⁵⁸ Gaunt et al. *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust*, 10–11.

⁵⁹ Laar, *War in the woods*. In my text, the resisters against German occupation are each time specified to avoid the confusion.

in their defence.⁶⁰ Jüri B. and Hans R. for instance maintained that they had been hiding people from the German authorities, and this was verified by neighbours and village deputies in the area.⁶¹ Peeter L. reported similar events, but referred to the resisters against German rule as “partisans”, a more bellicose and heroic choice of words. Ernst K. insisted that he had been labelled a communist during the German period and had suffered negative consequences because of it.⁶² Karl R. maintained that he had participated in such a resistance group and enclosed certificates from other men belonging to the group. All men of his age—he was 38 when declared a kulak and thus in his early thirties during the war years—had difficulties in explaining what they had been doing during the war and how they had escaped mobilisation in the Red Army. If they admitted to participation in the German army, they would instantly be declared enemies. It would be altogether possible that Karl R. and his friends exploited the propaganda about resistance against the Nazis and simply invented a resistance group, each corroborating the statements of the others. The appeal of Karl R. was instantly refused by the Executive Committee of the county and later by the Council of Ministers in autumn 1948. There were no reasons given for the refusal.⁶³

4.7.3. NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SOVIET UNION

Kulaks could be considered as having a negative attitude towards the Soviet Union for several reasons. Often they were simply described as “having the attitudes of class enemies towards the present order.”⁶⁴ Remarks about men hiding in the woods meant that the family was suspected of being “bandits”, which was worse than having a family member arrested.⁶⁵ The fact that the kulak families reluctantly paid their portion of the forced deliveries and payments was often considered as

⁶⁰ Matšulevitš, (ed.), *Pruun katk*, 205–16, 218–24.

⁶¹ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 112; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 151.

⁶² VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 132.

⁶³ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 742.

⁶⁴ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 696.

⁶⁵ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 265; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 714.

a sign of a negative attitude; in fact this was a frequent accusation.⁶⁶ In the Eastern Township, however, there were also frequent notes saying that an accused family had fulfilled its “norms” on time, as the forced sales of agricultural produce to the state at very low prices were called. Village deputies were expected to help the cadres responsible for acquisition in collecting and controlling the “norms”, as well as the lumbering duties, expected from every household. But there were more refined ways of cheating the Soviet Union than to evade the “norms”. The accusation that a kulak had kept his good horse for himself and left his old horse for socialisation when he joined a kolkhoz can show the level of detailed knowledge, particularly in economic transactions, used in the deliberations.⁶⁷ The moment individuals were pronounced kulaks, they of course had to leave the kolkhoz immediately.



A “red procession” (Est. Punavoor) with forced deliveries to the nearest town. These deliveries were dressed up as festive occasions, with banners and flags.

This festivity was intended to demonstrate the solidarity between the rural population and city dwellers, simultaneously implying solidarity and generosity towards the regime.

⁶⁶ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 111; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 266; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 714, etc.

⁶⁷ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 701A.

In the communist land reform, peasants lost their lands exceeding 30 hectares; the rest was given to settlers. As noted previously, this form of forced co-habitation seemed to be designed to create tensions. It is therefore not surprising to find accusations against kulaks for bad treatment of settlers. Ill-treatment of settlers was considered rebellious behaviour against the Soviet state.⁶⁸ Another case of rebellious acts involved a woman who ran away from a training course held by the secretary of the village soviet, a very small offence towards the Soviet state.

Political factors thus quite frequently played a role in the kulak declarations. In some cases in the Southern Township, a long history of political contestations during the 20th century emerges. Those who were declared kulaks are held up as enemies of the revolutionary forces throughout Estonia's contemporary history. But political accusations were not always used. The most frequent accusation against kulaks concerned their connections to the Germans particularly when they were suspected of using Russian prisoners of war as farm labourers. Many other kinds of connections were also evoked, even that of a son-in-law who had been enrolled in the Waffen-SS. Suspected kulaks found it hardest to contradict accusations of having assisted the Germans. It is interesting that resistance against the Soviet Union does not at all seem to have been given the same kind of attention in the accusations. It was discussed, and kulaks were often called recalcitrant [Est. *vastutõrjujad*], but I have not found one single case where such accusations in themselves had caused someone to be declared a kulak; rather, such accusations were used to strengthen other reasons for being assigned this status. Being on the wrong side during the war was therefore the most important political criterion.

4.7.4. FAMILY VICE

When someone was arrested as a kulak in 1944–1945, family members of that person were frequently also later arrested, with the initial arrest being used as the basis for accusing others in the family. Twenty-one kulak files, or about 10 per cent of the total, in the studied townships concerned families in which the husband had been arrested. The fami-

⁶⁸ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 130.

lies were considered guilty even if they had not shared the fate of the accused husband. If a woman did not want to be singled out because of charges against her husband, she had to disown him publicly and show divorce documents to the authorities.⁶⁹ Thus, Anna H. wrote that her husband and children had fled to Germany, but that she had chosen to stay because she did not share his political views. She enclosed documents showing that she had divorced him.⁷⁰ The accusation against her was thus an accusation against an enemy who had escaped. Her farm had already been reduced to five hectares, which suggests that she and her family had already been regarded as enemies of the people. Her attempt to distance herself from her husband did not help. Her appeal was refused in September 1948. Still, she was not on the list of the deported.

Children in kulak families had no possibility to distance themselves from family members, as far as I have been able to tell from the documents. In a number of other cases, the political accusations were about activities of the sons, or even sons-in-law, who had collaborated with Germans. In some cases it is only stated that the son had been arrested. Or like thousands of others he could be lost in the war—a circumstance that could also be turned against the family. One declaration attested:

“Under the German occupation, one son volunteered in the *Omakaitse*; the other son was serving in the German army and his whereabouts are unknown.”⁷¹

Several printed forms that had to be filled in to get a job or to apply for membership in the Communist Party contained the explicit question: “Do you have a relative or somebody else close to you who has been repressed?” One family could be accused of several types of contact with the Germans. The forms of collaboration most often evoked were a son or husband participating in the German army, a relative convicted for collaboration (mostly in 1945), or a family member having some kind of position during the German occupation. It is impossible to check the veracity of such accusations, and the kulaks seldom touched upon them in their appeals.

⁶⁹ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 695 for instance.

⁷⁰ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 774.

⁷¹ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 274.

There seems to have been a wish to finally remove from the community families in which the husband had been convicted, arrested or had for other reasons been removed or left the area. These were families that had been affected in multiple ways, not an unusual fate in Soviet repressions. Every inculpation for lack of loyalty towards the Soviet system not only resulted in the elimination of the person deemed guilty, but also meant that a family suffered the loss. As the accusations often were not guided by a traditional sense of justice, this situation continuously produced new enemies. The assertion from the Bible that the sons do not inherit the sins of the fathers was quoted during Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union, but in practice, entire families were considered enemies.

Other kinds of links are not always possible to show, but it is conceivable that elderly people accused of being kulaks were parents of younger men considered enemies or convicted because of Nazi collaboration during the war. In this way, the portion of elderly people among kulaks might additionally be explained by repeated repressions, the tendency toward total eradication of enemy families, individual guilt or individual behaviour notwithstanding. This can only be verified in the cases where the kulak files expressly indicate that the sons participated in the war on the German side.

4.8. Kulak Strategies

What kinds of themes were evoked by the kulaks themselves? One such theme was their actual sympathy for Soviet power. Erik L. wrote that his son had been captured by the Germans in Staraya Russa in 1941. The son was later released and went on fighting for the Red Army until his demobilisation in 1946. Erik L.'s second son was a communist instructor (*komsorg*). His appeal was refused, and according to an anonymous note, the son had in reality deserted to the German side in Velikiye Luki. The committee apparently considered this remark to be reliable, and Erik L. and his wife and daughter were subsequently deported to Siberia. The communist instructor son was, however, spared this fate.⁷²

⁷² VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 122.

Those accused of being kulaks could also refer to older merits in favour of revolutionary forces in Estonia. Elvi H. wrote that her father had belonged to a council of workers and peasants in Estland in 1917. At that point in time he had participated in the expropriation of two large estates, whereupon he had been confined in a German prison in 1918. The revolutionary father wrote a letter of support for his daughter who had been pointed out as a kulak. Her appeal was not received, she remained a kulak, though she was not deported.⁷³

Jaan K., 45 years old, had worked as a village deputy. He was accused of exploiting wage labour and of having had a prisoner of war work on his farm during the war. He defended himself, saying that during the time in question his father-in-law had owned the farm. The chairman of the township Executive Committee certified that he had not been owner of the farm until 1945. Jaan K. used a biblical expression, often used by Stalin, that the sins of the fathers should not be visited upon the children. His appeal was first accepted, but later, in autumn 1947, his case was reopened. When his second appeal was refused, he wrote a long and bitter letter to Nikolai Karotamm. He wrote that while he had not joined the Communist Party, he had spoken in favour of kolkhozes as he considered them a rational way to solve the labour shortage in the Estonian countryside. This was the reason, he maintained, that he had been denounced as a kulak: someone who had not shared his views had sought to get him out of the way. The letter did not get a response, and Jaan K. was deported together with his wife, his son and his mother-in-law.⁷⁴

Many of the accused had served as village deputies; others had belonged to the agricultural commission implementing the communist land reform of 1945.⁷⁵ Their collaboration with Soviet power can be interpreted in different ways. One possible explanation is that the kulak declarations could have been used as a silent revenge for injustices inflicted in the beginning of the dekulakisation campaign. Revenge against the Germans was an openly evoked and regular theme in dekulakisation. But it was possible for revenge to be taken against early Soviet activists as well. Another interpretation, to some extent contra-

⁷³ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 245.

⁷⁴ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 299.

⁷⁵ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 250; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 263.

dicting the first, is often documented in the material. It was thought that wealthy peasants and Nazi collaborators would be the first ones consciously to seek for themselves positions inside the Soviet hierarchy. Many had previously held leading positions and could be considered as pillars of society, which a new power would be happy to enrol. Doing this, they might escape being recognized, and hide in the bosom of the enemy. Participating, they would also be better informed and able to take care of their closest friends and relatives.

Kulaks were not allowed to join kolkhozes, but from the kulak's point of view, on the other hand, it might have seemed advantageous to join kolkhozes at an early stage in order to evade repression.⁷⁶ The K. family, which had a girl to help in the household while the wife was working in an industrial plant and the husband was creating a kolkhoz, has been discussed earlier in this study. Mr K. represented himself as a pioneer of collectivisation and a pillar of Soviet agricultural policy. The K. family became an early example of the strategy of depicting oneself as a supporter of Soviet power. This example was later used locally in order to warn the authorities. Calls for attention to be paid to kulaks trying to "sneak" into kolkhozes were regularly expressed, and the authorities exhorted vigilance and continued purges. In the Northern Township, where the K. family had lived, these purges took on virulent proportions after the deportations.⁷⁷ The picture of the wife in a luxury car with the Nazi leaders, and the husband celebrating in the kolkhoz with a drinking binge, became a symbol of the bourgeoisie, who indulged in wild party life. The family was visible in several ways

⁷⁶ Taagepera, "Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Taxation Phase," 276–278.

⁷⁷ Twelve families in all were declared kulaks in the Northern Township in spring and summer 1950 after the VIII plenum of the ECP. Another family was accused already in autumn 1949, but the case was not closed until the wave of purges in 1950. VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 244; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 249; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 260; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 261; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 271; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 273; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 276; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 277; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 283; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 287; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 289; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 291; VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 298. There were similar purges in the two other townships as well, but not in such concentrated form.

and evoked many local reactions. One of them seems to be simple jealousy on the part of village residents.

However, to consort with the enemy was not a mere figure of thought or discursive strategy. It meant that the individual was actually working to change the system in the direction pointed out by the central government and locally advocated by the local authorities and the Communist Party. The example of Mr K. was one such instance, and many others turned up in discussions during the first stormy years of the Estonian kolkhozes. In a similar way, people who had been accepted as members of the Communist Party or who had worked for the local soviets could be “unmasked” as having a dubious past, or a “spoilt biography” as historian Orlando Figes has termed it. They were accused of having owned large farms or employed farmhands, of having collaborated with the Germans or merely of having a relative in one of the categories of repressed persons. This strategy of cooperating with the enemy out of purely practical considerations was all the more attractive as the Soviet regime had a great need for personnel able and willing to be enrolled. It was a great advantage for Soviet authorities if those who joined in or went in the forefront also possessed authority in the local community and were respected by their neighbours. Such respect often was paid to men who had participated in the township leadership, in cooperatives and in church councils before the war.

The strategy evoked counterattacks on the part of the Bolshevik party, increasing the control of people appointed for various posts in the administration. To begin with, this mechanism had been inefficient since the controlling officials were not chosen among the locals, who were considered unreliable. Instead, they were chosen among those who had been living in, or at least spent the war years in the Soviet Union and thus could be relied on, though this also meant that they did not know local society very well. The state agency for external security, the NKGB, had particular problems with a large portion of officials from other parts of the Soviet Union who needed translators even in their daily work.⁷⁸ They simply did not know the people they were supposed to supervise.

Still, the use of the example of the K. family merits attention since it shows the rationale of the negotiations. There was a certain

⁷⁸ ERAF F.19, Op. 3, Vol. 13: 63.

unease to begin with, which was due to the fact that the spouses both worked loyally for the benefit of Soviet power and for the collectivisation project, at a moment when the authorities had difficulties with its reaching out, and it was not impossible that they would have instead been held up as an example to be followed by others. The final result was achieved in a negotiation about what comportment should be considered loyal and what should be seen as attempts to deceive Soviet power. In that negotiation, kulak criteria were not discussed at all. As far as farmhands and working conditions were concerned, the family was acquitted. It seems to have been the accusation of collaboration with Litzmann that was decisively to their disadvantage. Binge drinking in the kolkhoz, the name of which was “New Life”, was not an unusual event in any case, and the accusation that the party had been an act of sabotage against work in the kolkhoz seems rather unconvincing.⁷⁹ The couple K. seems to have been well aware of the situation. They wrote another appeal, but did not show up at the “kulak court” in September 1948, where their appeal was rejected. When the deportations were prepared in March 1949, they were already far from Viljandi County.

Proof of sympathy toward communism had formerly been a circumstance which could cause a reconsideration of kulak declarations. If someone in the household had been in jail during German occupation the whole family could gain from it. Help to Soviet activists who hid in the forest during occupation was also an advantage for the family. One man was acquitted (though he remained under surveillance) on the grounds that he had exposed a “bandit group” to the Soviet authorities.⁸⁰

We do not know whether the sympathies of kulaks for the Soviet system were genuine or not, even if such views seem improbable. What interests us here is that such sympathies were expected to lead to acquittal from kulak status. Technically, political preferences had nothing to do with the decrees about kulak taxes, but both sides used political preferences as arguments in the negotiation about what should be regarded as indications of being a kulak or not. It was part of the hidden agenda, where the question of being friend or enemy of the system often seemed to be of greater import than the conjectural

⁷⁹ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 297.

⁸⁰ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 79A: 48. June 1948.

attempt to define the enemy in juridical terms. Being part of the loyal cadres could therefore be a winning argument in the negotiation.

4.9. Negotiations as Participation

The Soviet regime wanted to give the kulak campaign a character of class struggle, which provided an opening for some discussion by the accused about the righteousness of the accusation. This opening was used by practically all the accused kulaks, and the support they were able to mobilise in local society was probably unexpected by the regime. The protests were very limited and did not question the campaign or the criteria used for singling out kulaks. However, the protests were deeper than they seemed; though they were focused on the fate of a single family which the protesters said had not met the criteria for being named kulaks, by implication the protesters' argument extended to all families. In addition, the kulak courts and the forms and appeals presented there functioned as sites where the meaning of friend and enemy, loyalty and guilt were discussed, and at the focus of this discussion were the war and the German occupation. The accusations of collaboration or friendliness towards the Nazis were not documented and in the general atmosphere of distrust in the late Stalinist period were probably grossly exaggerated. Still, the accused did not answer charges against them that were not corroborated by evidence, and the subject of collaboration with the Germans seems to have been avoided.

When the kulaks argued in political terms, they contended that they had been on the side of the winners. The limits of the negotiation seem to have been clear to all. Even if the concrete accusations of the kulak criteria had been refuted, accusations of collaboration prevailed, both on the local and central level. Concrete deeds of loyalty could help, but only if they involved going against the enemies of the Bolsheviks.

The negotiation involved the victims and a large number of bystanders, which is significant. They participated since there was a small but still real possibility to win, due to the legalistic forms of the procedure, as decrees and criteria could be discussed. Sometimes they stepped into the quagmire of false loyalty and unproved accusations, but these were exceptions. Participation was broad and shows the resistance of the kulaks and their friends and neighbours. But through participating

in this way they also became part of the process of their own destruction since the negotiation served as a legitimisation of the process itself.

The final kulak lists were the outcome of the kulak campaign on the local level. About half of the families on these lists were deported; the other half escaped deportation, but had to live with “spoilt biographies” which meant they had to live like outlaws. They lost their property, they could not get good jobs, stay in the countryside, or study and of course they lost what citizenship rights they had. A statistical survey of the families on the lists will show how the framework and the negotiation coincided.

4.10. The Result of Negotiations: Kulak Declarations

4.10.1. CLASS RHETORIC

The entire negotiation over kulak declarations was framed in the rhetoric of class struggle. The implications were that kulaks exploited poor peasants and prospered as a consequence. Their wealth would thus be a proof of exploitation, manifested in large land holdings in the past. The land reform had been carried through by the time the task of identifying kulaks fell on the local soviet/council system. Land ownership thus was not part of the official criteria, but the previous size of the farm nevertheless was pencilled in on practically every kulak declaration. Was it important for the outcome?

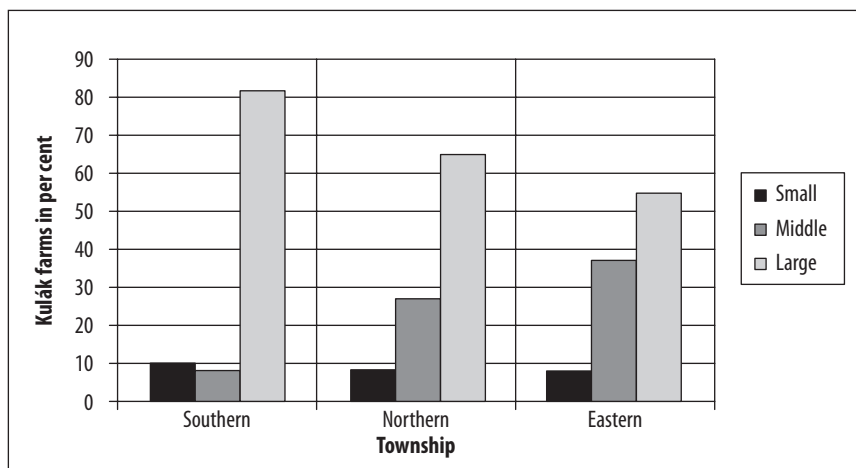
To investigate the importance of this part of class rhetoric, the sizes of kulak farms have been compared to non-kulak farms in the three townships according to the agrarian census of 1939 (see Appendix I). The comparison is not exact since the census did not include wartime changes and a number of farms could not be found in the 1939 material. Still, it is obvious that almost all the farms of those who were declared kulaks were comprised of more than 30 hectares of land in 1939. Moreover, most of these farms had 50–100 hectares of land, and thus numbered among the largest farms in the country. This was the segment of farmers sometimes called “grey barons”.⁸¹

⁸¹ In Estonian, *hallparun*. This concept, used both in popular contexts and among the communists, has strong roots in history. The German upper class before the First World War, the real barons, usually called the

Still, it is not possible to say that farm size mechanically led to kulak declarations, since not all peasants owning large farms were considered kulaks (See Appendix I). Only one out of four former large landowners was declared kulak in the Southern Township, whereas more than half of the owners of large farms were on the kulak list in the Eastern Township. Criteria indicating wealth other than land ownership—for instance, herd sizes or the number of farmhands prior to 1939—point in the same direction.

Differences between townships were discernible. Graph 4.1. shows the portion of large and smaller farms owned by kulaks. Kulak families that had owned large farms dominated in all townships, but most obviously in the Southern Township. The Eastern Township chose a larger share of peasant families with smaller farms, but then there were many more declared kulaks in that township than in the others.

Graph 4.1. The size of kulak farms



See Appendix 1. Small farms have less than 30 hectares, middle farms 31–50 hectares, large farms over 51 hectares.

Estonians “the grey ones”. When Estonian peasants began to purchase land in the 1860s, the wealthier among them were jokingly called “grey barons,” a concept invoking the small but still perceptible social difference in the countryside during independence.

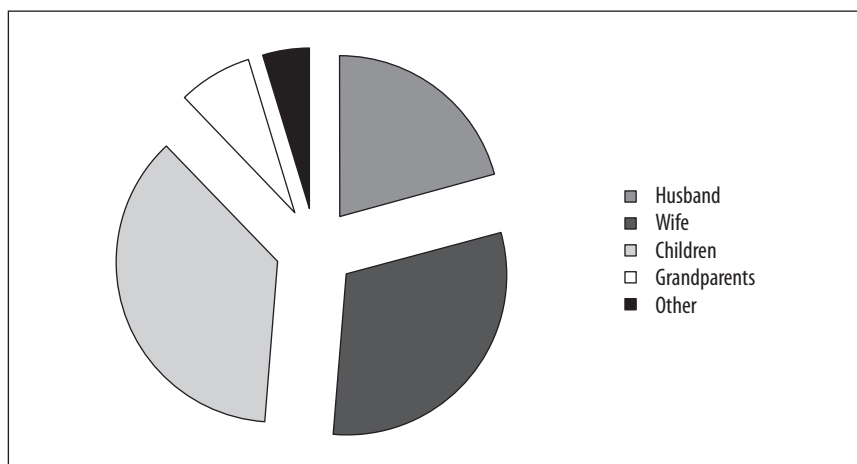
The selected households almost always belonged to the owners of the “old farms” (*vanatalud*), bought in tsarist times, which had had time to develop since then and were a little larger than average. There were a few exceptions—families that owned farms created in the Estonian land reform of 1919–25, which were less established and somewhat smaller. The social barrier between these categories of farms was not anything like differences between German landlords and Estonian peasants, but nevertheless they had political consequences already in the interwar period. The Estonian peasantry had been divided between a conservative Agrarian party appealing to the old farms, and a more radical Settler party speaking in favour of reform peasants as long as parties were permitted.⁸² The social differentiation taking place in the period 1880–1914 in Estonia thus had a real impact on the process.

4.10.2. HOUSEHOLDS LACKING LABOUR POWER

Exploitation was the basis of the official kulak criteria, and use of external labour power was the first consideration. However, this criterion could be problematic since few families actually had hired labour in the past. It risked striking at a group of weak households whose family members were unable to work, as the kulak appeals already have shown. An investigation of the outcome of selections shows that in all, 534 persons in the kulak households were chosen in the three townships in Viljandi county. The majority were children of various ages. Among the adults, six out of ten were women. Generally these were wives of household heads, but there was also a sizeable group of kulak households consisting of women with or without children. Some were single women, some widows and wives whose husbands had disappeared in the war. In no less than 21 households, the husband had been arrested, and the women and children were left behind. There were also elderly people, siblings of the head of the household or other adults.

Able-bodied men between 20–65 years of age only constituted 15 percent of the group. This was partly due to the ravages of war. Women headed forty per cent of the kulak households. The men in those families had disappeared, drafted into one army or the other, or were killed

⁸² Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 114.

Graph 4.2. The families of kulak households in Viljandimaa

VilMA, kulak files 599-2. The first category consists of male heads of households, the second their wives or female heads of households. The third category are children.

The fourth category includes fathers and mothers or in-laws of the nuclear family. Other grown-ups are shown in the last group, they belong to the household but not to the nuclear family.

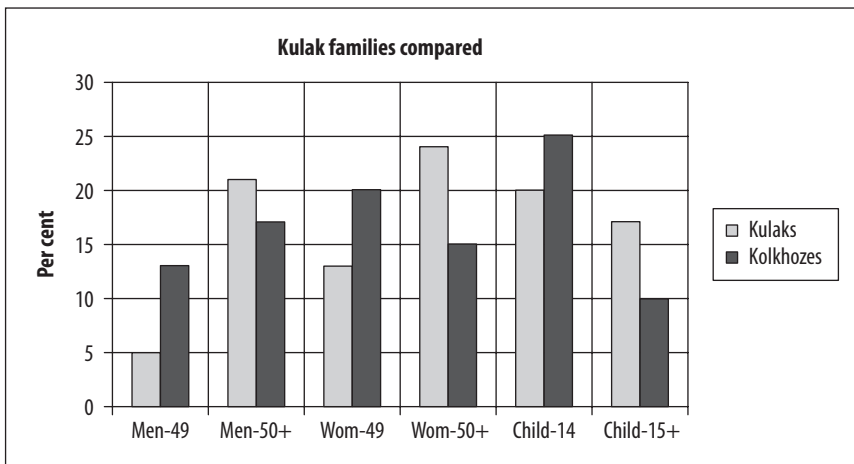
or arrested; in some cases a note is left in the files stating that their whereabouts was unknown, which probably meant that the particular individual was suspected of having fled to hide in the forest. Their wives and children and sometimes the older generation were left on the farm. The single women often had many people to take care of. One third of the small children belonged to households of single women, but there were also older children who were able to help out. Precisely one half of the elderly people belonged to the households of the single women who cared for them. Seven single mothers had small children and no other adults to help out in their families. Some women over the age of 65 lived alone.

The kulak families were not the same in the three townships, and differences were probably due to the choice that was made by the local authorities. In the Southern Township, which had few kulaks, the proportion of men 20–65 years old was relatively high, whereas the excess of women was large in the Eastern Township. Thirty per cent of kulak households in the Southern Township, 37 per cent in the Northern

Township and no less than 49 per cent in the Eastern Township consisted of women and children only.⁸³ There were also a large number of households consisting of elderly people. The husbands of these elderly families had not been engaged in the war. The gender difference in the kulak group was great—almost half of the men were over 65 years of age, as against 19 per cent of the women. Among younger people there were twice as many women as men. Thus, women and elderly men dominated the kulak lists, and the share of younger men was quite low.

To what extent were such families different from others in the neighbourhood? The war had taken its toll on younger men everywhere. Unfortunately, there are no population censuses from this period; not until 1956 was a new census carried out, and pre-war data will not show the effects of war on the male population. In comparing farms, I used 1939 data, but farms are slower to disappear than people. Finally, I preferred to compare kulak families with kolkhoz families in the same townships in 1949. The results are shown in Graph 4.3.; the figures can be found in Appendix II.

Graph 4.3. Kulak and kolkhoz families compared



See Appendix II.

⁸³ 15 of 51 households in the Southern Township, 16 of 43 in the Northern Township, 43 of 88 in the Eastern Township.

The kolkhozes as well as kulak families had an excess of women, but the excess was larger among kulak families. The observation that kulak families consisted of single women to an unusual extent is consistent with the comparison to kolkhoz families. The age structures were quite different too, as the kolkhozes had a large proportion of young families. In kolkhozes, the share of men younger than 50 years of age was twice that of kulak families, and the share of men aged 50–64 was almost the same, whereas men over 65 were significantly fewer in the kolkhozes.

The comparison shows that kulak families contained fewer able-bodied men than average and consisted more frequently of elderly people. The most obvious reason seems to be that single women and elderly people were more in need of external farmhands and daily labourers. The provision for such needs in the kulak decree was not always used by the local authorities. The Southern Township might have used the decree more extensively—this could explain the relatively smaller number of women-led households on the lists there. If, on the other hand, the Executive Committee on the local level sought to find as many kulak families as possible, the need for women to find external labourers could serve as a pretext to accuse them. This seems to have been the case in the Eastern Township.

The skewed gender and age composition of kulak families could be motivated by the wish finally to remove families in which the husband had been convicted, arrested or for other reasons had left the area. Such families, which were affected in multiple ways, experienced a fate not unusual in Soviet repressions. Every inculpation for lack of loyalty towards the Soviet system did not only result in the removal of the culpable person, but also meant that a whole family suffered the loss. As the accusations were against a traditional sense of justice, this situation continuously produced new enemies.

Another possible reason to choose weak families as kulaks was that local authorities might have been thinking about the productive capabilities of households, and for economic reasons trying to avoid kulak declarations of families with many able-bodied, working members. In this way, the productive forces of the township could be preserved. However, this would not explain the selection of kulaks in either the vindictive Eastern Township or the reluctant Southern Township. The productive capability was hurt by the accusation of too many people

as being kulaks in one case, and by the inclusion of more able bodied men in the other case.

The explanations used to understand the choice of women-led households as kulaks can be used to understand the high proportion of elderly people among the victims as well. As did single women, elderly people had a need for external farmhands and were therefore more exposed to kulak accusations, unless special consideration was taken of their age and working capacity. It is not always possible to show such links, but it is conceivable that elderly people accused of being kulaks were parents of younger men considered enemies, or convicted because of collaboration during the war. The large share of elderly people might thus be explained by repeated repression, the tendency toward total eradication of enemy families, individual guilt or individual behaviour notwithstanding. Finally, if local leaders were concerned about productivity, elderly people also would be an obvious choice, preferred to families in which many were of working age. This argument, however, is inconsistent with the documented behaviour of local leaders in this investigation. When many elderly families ended up on the kulak lists of the Eastern Township, it does not seem as if concerns for productivity were on the minds of the local committee; instead, this might be interpreted as a propensity to accuse weaker families in general.

4.10.3. EXPLOITERS OF THE RED ARMY

The motives given in the kulak declarations could, with some effort, be squeezed into the seven criteria given in the decree about kulak taxes. There was also ostensibly a relationship to class struggle rhetoric, one that claimed the presence of exploitation. Such claims were formulated as templates: a family had “constantly used non-family labour,” “earned incomes from a tractor and a thresher,” “had during the war access to two farms and leased out one of them” or, instead, “rented extra land during the war,” “received income from a mill (or a sawmill) on their land that they owned” or for which they had “traded”.

Looking deeper into the negotiations and the outcome of kulak selection, it becomes evident that the most frequent ground for kulak declarations had little to do with the kulak criteria, and much more to do with the war. The farmhands that kulak families were accused of

having used were not local girls or boys or day labourers; they were prisoners of war. Having had one, could be taken as an indication of collaboration. Not only were the families implicitly accused of collaboration; they had abused the glorious Red Army and exploited the ill luck of the institution that was to become the greatest pride of the Soviet Union.

Definitely out of the range of the given criteria are all the remarks in the kulak declarations about the relationship of the family to the German occupation power. There were many notes about participation in a German organisation or mobilisation in the German army. So, if class struggle was the official cause for the anti-kulak campaign, revenge for people's behaviour during the war seems to have been a more powerful driving force in the repression. It was also easier to understand for the local actors. Looking at the numbers in the area I have studied, it is clear that war-time behaviour, and in particular the use of prisoners of war in farm labour, was behind the majority of choices of kulaks, not class criteria. Being squeezed between the German and the Soviet armies was therefore a major source of repression even in this case, four years after the peace agreement.

Table 4.1. Kulak status referring to the German occupation, 1947–49

Township	Kulak families	Use of POW	Collaboration	Enemies of the people
Southern	53	35 (66 %)	18 (34 %)	8 (15 %)
Northern	43	27 (63 %)	11 (25 %)	4 (9 %)
Eastern	89	51 (57 %)	21 (24 %)	4 (4 %)
Total	185	113 (61 %)	50 (27 %)	16 (9 %)

Source: Kulak files, VilMA F. 599.

Use of a POW was the single most important reason for the declaration of kulak status. Collaboration with the German occupation power mentioned in the kulak characterisations was of the kind for which families had not been punished earlier, such as participation of a family member in the *Waffen-SS*. If membership in the home guard organisation *Omakaitse* or the auxiliary police was confirmed, the family was then declared to be enemies of the people. The members of these organisations had been arrested or executed; this time the rest of their families were singled out.

Reference to the formal criteria of the kulak decree was therefore a varnish covering another agenda. Most kulak families belonged to the group whose land had been reduced in the course of the Soviet land reform. In most cases, these were the “old farms,” purchased in the late 19th century. The existing social differences in the Estonian countryside, albeit small, did play a part in the dekulakisation drive. Still, only half of the residents of these old farms were later declared kulaks. Decisive for who would end up on these lists was alleged wartime behaviour. Even if the definitions are not precise, it is possible to maintain that alleged friendliness with the Nazis was less important than the element of misuse of, and perceived insult to, the Red Army. In all, only 20 per cent of the kulaks had *not* had accusations made against them for their wartime behaviour. In this, the Estonian families were more the victims of the occupation power policies, rather than collaborators—they had not taken sides consciously.

Another issue often used in the kulak declarations was alien to the class struggle aspect of dekulakisation—whether the families had fulfilled their quotas and norms for the forced sales of products. The attitude towards the Soviet regime was also noted, and both inability to meet quotas and unfriendly utterances were included. Kulak declarations therefore were directed towards alleged political attitudes more than they were based on economic criteria—centred not on an incomprehensible class struggle, but rather on a quite comprehensible game of taking sides. This could be easily grasped, but was utterly unpredictable for those involved, since the rules changed with each turn of the war, and the final victor was the one who passed judgement.

4.11. Conclusions

This study of the arguments used and the characteristics of victims actually chosen shows that class criteria were not prominent in the campaign of class struggle against the kulaks. The empirical and discursive analysis of arguments used in the process of singling out kulak households showed that other concerns were more prominent. Political concerns and references to the Second World War were used everywhere. It seems, moreover, that political and class references concurred to some extent in the Southern Township. The bureaucratic and

extensive procedure of kulak selection, used in the Eastern Township, resulted in another kind of kulak group. Class characteristics were less visible, and the choices seemed even more puzzling. Sadly, this also turned out to be a selection of weak households.

One rather unexpected aspect of the local source materials is the character of negotiation that the process actually had in the Estonian case. Kulak definitions were openly and locally discussed; there were minutes of the discussions, in which even some of the arguments used were recorded. These arguments soon acquired the characteristics of a template, a development that increased over time; in this template the modes of speech were at first vivid, but after time stiffened into formulas. The population and the victims themselves were far more active than has previously been known, and their activity constituted a kind of everyday resistance that has escaped attention until now. The process is consistent with the general view of Stalinism as an attempt to build an alternative society with a peculiar form of legal procedures. Apparently those participating in the negotiations surrounding the campaign saw it this way and hastened to take part in the small openings that existed for their voices to be heard. Simultaneously this was a double-edged participation. It produced some real results in the form of acquittals, but it also to some extent legitimized the persecution going on. Noteworthy characteristics of the alternative legality were the retroactivity and the use of general participation in the selection process through an undefined activist category. The expression used by Jan T. Gross, that Soviet power distributed the state monopoly of violence among the population at large, is justified in the Estonian case.

The arguments provided also show a certain sharing of the double standards of the period. Both the representatives of power in the form of local soviet councils and Communist Party members, and the people writing appeals (and they could be the same people in both cases) used the official kulak criteria, but beyond this they also argued about political loyalties and attitudes towards the Soviet Union. Wartime events, besides the use of POWs, and relationships with the Germans were only used by the persecutors. The defenders of kulak families were conspicuously silent about relations with the German occupation force, which still seems to have been quite important for the final outcome.

Summing up the arguments used for kulak accusations, the use of prisoners of war stands out as ostensibly an argument about exploi-

tation, having implications for both the relationships to Germans and to the Red Army. The prisoners of war became a symbol for the squeezing of the Estonians between occupation powers, something that never would have happened in a different geopolitical situation. In this way, the war events dominate the list of accusations, and actually 80 per cent of the accused kulak families were selected on the basis of allegations of their lack of loyalty to the Soviet Union in the war.

In addition, there were other aspects to the selection of kulaks. Selection often contained a class element in that most kulak families had owned larger than average farms. Still, differences were small and in normal terms of agrarian sociology, the kulak families made up the upper end of an even land distribution; solid class cleavages were hard to find. Yet, these differences were used in the bureaucratic procedure leading to kulak selection. This is also logical—land records were easy to use and to rely on. Even if previous land ownership played a part, not all large farms were used for kulak declarations, nor were these data used in a hierarchical order. A selection of these farm families constituted the kulak lists, and the main component of the selection was the use of prisoner of war labour. As a consequence, families with single women and elderly couples were among those chosen.

There thus was a close relationship between the kulak families and others in the countryside; there was local support for kulaks, and this was voiced in the appeals. This support was not limited to a given group of resisters; on the contrary, officials and Communist Party members took part to an extent that was embarrassing for Soviet power. With these criteria of kulak selection, it was difficult to distinguish the population in general from the victims. However, the repeated repressions taking place in the previous years were certainly a step in the direction toward defining a category of enemies of the Soviet Union. The strong element of repeated repression indicates attempts by the authorities to create such a closed group. The anti-kulak campaign was used to get rid of families who had been opposing in the past or had been included in previous rounds of repression. The enemies of the Soviet Union as a defined category had not easily been accepted in local society at this point. One of the lessons of the campaign was that the concept became used generally, and the group acquired an ascribed identity.

Of particular importance in this study is the salience of war in the process of selecting the victims. Bureaucratic procedures in the Soviet

repression campaigns have been underestimated in previous scholarship, as Chapter 3 shows. The omission of the war, particularly in the Estonian accounts of the repressions, risks distorting the history of this period. It is altogether understandable that Soviet repressions are the focus of interest in Estonia, but it is incorrect to treat them separately from the events during the Nazi occupation. Every document in the archives, concerning both victims and participants on the Soviet side, contains the question: What did you do during the war?

Chapter 5

Participation at the Local Level

The anti-kulak campaign was in its nature specifically characteristic of Soviet society and must be understood with a reference to the Marxist theory of class struggle. Local people receiving orders to single out kulak families were supposed to apply class criteria and class analysis to the task. While this would be a difficult task for a trained social scientist, for untrained and unprepared rural residents the task must have seemed incomprehensible. Still, it was crucial that it should be carried out by them, the “people”, labelled as the poor and middle peasantry of Viljandi County. They were to be the spearheads of the proclaimed class struggle, and their participation was not a question of their wish or will to participate, but a principle applied from above.¹ This participation, its conditions and the people participating, are at the centre of this chapter.

As explained in Chapter 1, partisans and sympathisers of the Communist Party were few in interwar Estonia. It is also obvious that those conducting the local anti-kulak campaign had not volunteered to do so, as the procedure analysed in Chapter 3 showed. The occur-

¹ Werth, *L'ivrogne et la marchande de fleurs*, 20–22 makes this distinction. The boundaries of these groups are far from clear. Security forces also participated in mass operations; and the Communist Party was, as usual, involved in everything. But popular participation in an organized form, rather than through denunciations, distinguishes the dekulakisation campaigns.

rence of mass participation in acts of repression is a particularly burdensome legacy of communist societies, and goes some way to explain why post-communist societies still today have special difficulty in coming to terms with the past. Victims of the system wish to find, and often look in vain for clear-cut perpetrators in specific cases, not just Stalin himself. When they examine the documents, they are confronted by bureaucratic forms with several signatures and the appearance of legality. Still, the individuals behind these bureaucratic processes must have been aware of how their following of the rules affected the victims. So who then were the participants and why did they participate?

Earlier studies of perpetrators of mass persecutions have pointed out—as briefly discussed in Chapter 2—a few motives or driving forces. Some of these findings have found more corroboration than others in this local study. Ideological and political motives might have bearing on decisions on the central level—on the local level people with communist convictions have not featured very prominently in the present study. A closer study at the local level allows for consideration of both, personal convictions among the actors and the character of Communist Party relations towards other groups and individuals.

Zygmunt Bauman emphasised characteristics of modernity such as division of labour and obedience. On the lower levels of hierarchies, obeying or being a cog in a larger machinery lifts the personal responsibility off the individual, which in Bauman's view is characteristic of modern societies.² From this point of view, perpetrators have bureaucratic rather than primitive characteristics. The bureaucratic character of the whole process was emphasised in Chapter 3. It was not driven by individual initiatives such as denouncements, but by orders, and carried through with the help of registers, census data, and systematic surveys of the population. The question is, do bureaucratic motives, and the tendency to minimize personal responsibility and replace it with obedience in particular, also play a part on the individual level?

Christopher Browning, in his famous book *Ordinary Men*, as well as Jan T. Gross in his work about the Soviet conquest of Poland in 1939 (*Revolution from Abroad*) points to social peer pressure in addition to the lack of personal responsibility among the perpetrators of the

² Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 98–102

auxiliary police battalion he describes.³ The Ural-Siberian method in the 1929–34 anti-kulak campaign used the same kind of mechanism.⁴ To what extent were the same kind of methods applied in the areas of Estonia examined in this local study? Were they important for the individual actors in the Estonian countryside? Gross also points to old quarrels and vindication.⁵ In his research, the local perpetrators seemed to form a local network, with previous contacts, or as he put it, “clans”.

Finally, Stephen Kotkin has added the hypothesis of rivalry between the Communist Party and the government institutions as a specific feature of the Soviet Union.⁶ This theory as well should be investigated in the Estonian case.

Preserved in the archival holdings from the Soviet period are enormous amounts of biographical material that was used in the systematic screenings of the population; use of this material was a very important, and so far relatively understudied, characteristic of Soviet society. This material is used here in the present study, taking into account that those writing it were conscious of the rules of the society. Besides biographical data that are easily controllable, the explanations and motives disclosed will not be accepted as personal beliefs. Biographies or life stories in the archives are not really suited to providing answers to the “why” question. Still, these data, together with those gathered from organisational materials, minutes and other records, can give us a more fine-grained picture of the actors involved and allow for informed guesses as to their motives and reasons.

In this chapter, some examples of participants in the campaign in Viljandi County will be examined. The trajectories of people in responsible positions in the Estonian SSR, who signed papers and activated processes, will be traced, with the aim of better understanding the context of their participation and behaviour in the specific situation of persecution of the kulaks in Estonia. This discussion of the individual level will then be followed by a discussion of how aspects of the organisation of society contributed to persuading people to participate in persecution.

³ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 188–189; Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 145.

⁴ Chapter 2, pages 47–48.

⁵ Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 42.

⁶ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, Chapter 5.

5.1. The Local Nomenklatura

I went to look for participants in the personal files of the cadres, the obligatory data about every person who had been appointed to an official position with a salary on the local level.⁷ These are available on the county level, and for officials who were members of the Communist Party, application forms and files on personal matters are also stored in the party archive.⁸ Every form asked for information about party membership, but I might have missed information in the party archive about those who joined at a later stage. In particular, I looked for the officials in the council, or soviet system of Executive Committees and village soviets who were expected to deliver kulak lists. They had chosen administrative work, as distinct from those who had voluntarily joined the NKGB, or chosen to work full time for the Communist Party.

The main initiative on the local level was with the administrative leadership of townships, the township Executive Committees. Chairmen of these committees put their signatures under declarations of kulak status for families and the written reasons claimed for the appropriateness of this status. Circulars discussing the course of the campaign, exhorting better performance and accusing certain township leaders of a “liberal stance” in the kulak question, were addressed at the township chairmen.⁹ The empirical data of this study also show that the township level was crucial—this is where decisions were made. The differences between townships inside the county were great and systematic. The length of kulak lists in villages in the same township depended on the township; the variation seems to be due to the procedures and orders emanating from the township, not from the village soviet. On the higher level, the county Executive Committee, Viljandi county had proportionally more kulaks than other counties, but this could be explained by the fertile land and the relatively prosperous farms in general. The minutes of party meetings on the local level do not include any information on actions, but only reiterate general

⁷ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K.

⁸ ERAF F.19, Op. 2.

⁹ VilMA F.133, Op. 1, Vol. 30: 2; VilMA F.507, Op. 1, Vol. 3: 10, 15.

catch-phrases such as: “We have to intensify the campaign against the kulaks.”¹⁰ This is a statement very different from the one made by the township and county Executive Committee saying that one particular family is to be considered kulak.

The township Executive Committees belonged to the lowest level of the *nomenklatura* system. Members for this committee were proposed by the body on the next level of the hierarchy—the county Executive Committee. Proposed candidates were then screened by the cadre department of the Communist Party. Lower echelons of the local soviet system—the leaders of village soviets and the commissions inside the township Executive Committees, like the land or the tax commissions—were not in the *nomenklatura* system but were appointed and approved by the township Executive Committee, and information about them was delivered on to the Communist Party.¹¹

Judging from the number of questions in the documentation in the personal files and the space used in answering them, the activities of administrators-to-be during the war seem to have been of prime importance. Several files contain later accusations over omissions in the forms and written declarations of membership in German organisations or the Waffen-SS. These incidents often occurred when someone was accused of other kinds of misconduct at work. In such incidents, the cadre section or the police investigated the record of the accused, upon which some of them were “unmasked” as having relations to the German regime. Those who were exposed, lost their jobs and were expelled from party organisations such as, for instance, the Komsomol; other punishments were not mentioned. The interest of the cadre section in such cases also extended to all family members. The screening of women during the war was less detailed; they often state that they worked on the family farm.

When candidates were screened for employment, biographical data and political affiliation were the main issues. Their skills for the job they applied for received little attention in the documentation as compared, for instance, to their relationship to the German occupiers. A case in point was a man who participated as a political instructor

¹⁰ E.g. VilMA F.421, Op. 1, Vol. 2: 15–17.

¹¹ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 42–43, 54, 80, 86.

in the Seventh Rifle Corps (*laskurkorpus*), an Estonian detachment of the Red Army, and after the war became a director of the Olustvere School of Agricultural Technology; his only professional education was an unfinished training as electrician.¹² The preoccupation with biography must be borne in mind when reading documents collected on, and from, all Soviet people. For everyone, the primary concern was to appear as part of “the working classes”. In view of the very active education system in interwar Estonia, it is probable that some applicants did not include information on their secondary education in declarations, as it might have been considered better to have little education than to be highly trained or educated.

Those of peasant background stress that they belonged to the categories of middle or poor peasants—specifying that their parents’ farms did not employ farmhands. Many cadres classify themselves as agricultural workers, even if they worked on the farms of their parents or relatives.¹³ Only a few persons admitted they had parents who were owners of small businesses, but those few also mentioned a Jewish background, and had a record of active resistance against the Nazis.¹⁴

Most of those who worked in local administration on the township and village levels in the late 1940s were born in Viljandi County. In this study, 34 officials active from 1945–1949 in the three townships have been identified, selected among those who were in the position to sign kulak declarations or who participated actively in the preparation of the village lists. Only five of these were born outside Viljandi County. The majority were men. Estonians, not Russians, dominated numerically in the local soviet administration; on the files, only one Russian speaker, born in Russia, was found at this level.¹⁵ It is also noteworthy that two thirds of the local officials were not party members. In the Southern Township, almost half were members or

¹² VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 11: 76–78.

¹³ For instance VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 256–86: J. M. calls himself a farmhand at a farm with his surname, which the family rented. Or VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 11: 62–66, E. V. was a farmhand on the farm on which her parents lived.

¹⁴ VilMA F.312, Op. 2K, Vol. 1.

¹⁵ Liivik confirms that the recruitment was 100% local in “Parteikomiteed 1944–1960” [Party committees 1944–1960], 109.

member candidates of the Communist Party or members of the youth organisation, the Komsomol. In the Northern Township and Eastern Township there were only a couple of Communist Party members. Moreover, less than half of the men had been in the Red Army, some because they were too old to serve.¹⁶ As expected, few admitted to having a secondary-level education.

These data concern people very close to the process. Historian Indrek Paavle has made an investigation of all township Executive Committee chairs in Estonian SSR 1940–1950, which can serve as a comparison. The chairmen, over 90 per cent of whom were ethnic Estonians,¹⁷ were more often members of the Communist Party than in my sample—by 1947 two thirds were members, candidates for membership, or belonged to the Komsomol, compared to only one third in my research area.¹⁸ Between half and two thirds admitted to primary education only.¹⁹ My local study contains only a few men on this level; most belong to lower staff or the village soviets.

Comparing the biographical data of Executive Committee members to Communist party officials on the same level, their backgrounds were similar: they were local people with only elementary schooling. One difference between the Executive Committees and the Communist Party was that in the latter, the men had normally served in the Red Army. In Estonia as a whole, a majority of the Communist Party officials were of Estonian origin, 85 per cent as compared to 91 for the Executive Committee chairs. They had somewhat lower education and were members of the Communist Party, of course.²⁰

¹⁶ In my collection there are 34 life stories [Est. *elulookirjeldus*], containing data from people who served in the three townships. 85 per cent were born in Viljandi County, 74 per cent had only a primary-level education, 35 per cent were party members.

¹⁷ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 160, Table 9.

¹⁸ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 174, Table 13.

¹⁹ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 170, Table 12.

²⁰ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 160, 170.



Local officials. To the left, the Communist Party organiser, in uniform. In the middle, the new township Executive Committee chairman, a young man in Red Army Uniform. To the right, the old township Executive Committee chairman to be replaced, a local man in very casual clothing. The photograph is not from the studied townships, but displays characteristics found there as well. Photo: ERAF.

One level higher, the officials of the county Executive Committees, in contrast, were brought in from other parts of the country or were sometimes born in Russia, but still claimed Estonian nationality. All men among the county officials had served in the Red Army according to their biographies, most were Communist Party members and had at least a secondary-level education if not more.²¹

5.2. The Cadre Policy

What was asked from the cadres? The main emphasis was on their “class character” and their conduct in the war and the German occupation of Estonia. Considerably less interest was shown in their skills

²¹ ERAF F.19, Op. 2, organised in alphabetical order after the name.

and working experience. The form to be filled in by local Executive Committee cadres contained 40 questions. Several of these concerned individuals' social origins, and that of their parents. Farmers and their children were asked to specify the size of the farm they had owned before 21 June 1940, the number of cattle and draught animals, the degree of mechanisation on the farm, the use of farmhands both on the farm of the parents and that of the applicant. The local Executive Committee and village soviet workers seldom were revolutionaries; for instance, they normally had entered kolkhozes after the deportations.²² Still, there were also people who had belonged to partisan units during the war. Several mention relatives, a son, or a husband, killed by the Germans.²³

Allegiances to political parties were at the centre of six questions, which asked applicants to specify the time they had belonged to political organisations. If applicants had formerly been members of the Communist Party or the Komsomol, they had to explain the reasons why they left, or the reasons for expulsion if they had been thrown out of the party in the course of a purge. They were also asked whether they had ever hesitated to follow the party line or belonged to the opposition. Needless to say, there were no such confessions in the local material.

Relations to places and people outside the Soviet Union were of interest to cadres. The cadre department wanted to know whether applicants had been abroad, and when and in what circumstances. If candidates had relatives living abroad, they were required to specify the country of residence of these, when they had left Estonia, whether they were still in contact, and, if not, when contact had been severed. They were also asked to state their knowledge of foreign languages, divided into the languages of peoples inside the Soviet Union and others.

A few questions concerned participation in underground partisan or revolutionary movements. War and occupation experiences were investigated through seven questions; these asked for the highest degree of specification of all questions in the questionnaire. The life

²² For instance VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 2: 24; VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 3: 53.

²³ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 221–231; VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 296–304.

of applicants during the German occupation had to be described in detail, when and where they had been working and what kind of work they had done. Not only were they asked whether they had been involved in repressive work in the police, Gestapo or other surveillance organisations, but they also had to expressly state membership in Estonian prewar organisations such as the Estonian home guard *Kaitseliit* and the official political organisation in the late 1930s, *Isamaaliit*. One man wrote that he had served in the orchestra of the Estonian home guard.²⁴ Those who were found to have belonged to Nazi-led organisations were normally thrown out of their jobs and removed from Communist organisations.²⁵

Such confessions in the archives served the purposes of the security forces. It is easy to imagine that a signed document could be used in a purge to show that the applicant had concealed biographical data, be it an uncle in Australia or a having parents who owned a threshers on their farm.²⁶ The emphasis on class and war are well known, however, the emphasis on foreign contacts has less purely ideological roots. In Estonia and the other Baltic countries, the mass flight of large portions of the population before Soviet reoccupation in autumn 1944 accounts for the specific interest, but of course the paranoia of the entire Stalinist period is reflected in these questions.

Several applicants had been in the Soviet Union during the war; most of these were specialists, holding positions such as leader of a local educational bureau, or veterinary inspection service. A few of them state a Jewish background. The locals transferred to the Soviet Union during the war lived in locations far apart from one another, in places such as Kazakhstan, Sverdlovsk, Cheljabinsk, and Saratovsk.²⁷ Still, the Communist Estonian shadow government, mentioned in Chapter 1, was able to locate them during the war and offer the men places in the Estonian detachments of the Red Army, the women education for administrative posts in the Estonian SSR.

The life story of a county official, chairman of the Executive Committee of Viljandi county from 1948 to 1950, a comrade Ermus,

²⁴ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 1.

²⁵ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 9: 322.

²⁶ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 12: 243.

²⁷ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 1.

deviates somewhat from the township and village level. He was born on the island Saaremaa at the beginning of the century, so he was not a local boy. His father had rented a farm from a manor and participated in the revolution of 1905, where he was killed by the manor owner. The mother went on as a farmhand and raised three children. Ermus had been a shepherd from the age of seven. Looking for a job, he went to Petrograd to work in an arms factory, where he was an apprentice, and later he worked in the city's tramway system. He was still too young to participate in the First World War. During the Russian Revolution he was back with his mother on Saaremaa. He explained the absence of revolutionary participation to Soviet authorities by claiming he had been ill, his feet frost-bitten.

In the Estonian Republic, Ermus worked as a locksmith and on the railway, but in 1925 became unemployed. After that he worked as a peat cutter and held several other jobs for shorter durations. In 1941, the first year of Soviet occupation, he became a candidate member of the Communist Party and participated in the evacuation to Russia (often this involved participating in destruction battalions, but he does not mention this). In August 1941 he was evacuated by boat to Leningrad and later worked in Cheljabinsk, probably in a labour battalion, until he was picked up by the Estonian Seventh Rifle Corps. There he became a political commissar, was later promoted to the cadre schooling of the CPSU preparing for the reoccupation of Estonia, and arrived in Viljandi on 6 October 1944. To begin with, he held a position in the Executive Committee, and was responsible for carrying out forced deliveries. In January 1948, he replaced a comrade Litter, aviation engineer, as the Executive Committee chairman. Ermus admitted only five years of primary schooling and three months of Communist Party schooling; his spelling and grammar were still bad.²⁸ The county officials were not from Viljandi county as a rule and they were mostly Communist Party members. Most often they had spent the years of German occupation in the backwaters of the Soviet Union.

Ermus was responsible on the county level for the kulak lists sent to the Estonian SSR Council of Ministers. His name is found on the decisions of the "kulak court". The people selecting kulaks on the local

²⁸ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 6:10–24.

level were on the other hand clearly locally recruited, or had returned home as demobilised soldiers. This background also speaks of their knowledge of local people and conditions. Since the chairmen of the township Executive Committees were singled out as the responsible officials who had great influence, they will be used here as examples of the variation of participant “careers”.

5.3. The Reluctant Henchman

Hans N. had been a sawmill worker in the interwar years. He was originally a Socialist Revolutionary, opposed to the regime of Konstantin Päts, and sympathetic towards the Soviet Union. After the communist coup in June 1940, he joined the red militia and a year later was accepted as a member of the Communist Party. When Nazi Germany attacked Estonia, he was scheduled to be evacuated to the Soviet Union. Somehow, however, this did not happen, and the circumstances surrounding this failure to be evacuated were thoroughly investigated in the filtration campaign in autumn 1944. Those who had remained in German-occupied territory automatically lost their party membership; Hans N. applied to get his reinstated. His personal file contains nine witness reports on the matter, all from people living and working rather close to him.

From these witnesses, whose testimonies agree with each other, a coherent picture of Hans N. emerges. As the German army drew close to the Estonian border in July 1941, Hans N. was working in the Executive Committee of the Southern Township. A group of Russian soldiers passed through the village and encouraged him and others working there to leave, since their safety could no longer be guaranteed. Hans and the others entered cars heading for the town of Viljandi, but the local leader of the security force gave them orders not to move until the Germans had arrived. They returned and ran into German troops. Some shooting followed and they fled. Their village was already on fire, so they went back towards Viljandi. Some kilometres outside of town, they encountered the Estonian voluntary Home Guard and decided to disperse. When one of the witnesses later was caught and drawn into a German car, Hans N. was already sitting in the car as a captive.

Hans N. was sent first to a concentration camp in Viljandi. In 1942, he was working in labour camp in the peat bog in Harku just outside of Tallinn. Later he was transferred to the central prison in Tallinn, the Battery (Est. *Patarei*), from which he made an unsuccessful attempt to escape. Still later he was sent to a work camp in Vasalemma, and from there to a lumbering camp in Piirsalu, from where he finally escaped in May 1944. One witness had met him in the woods of the Southern Township, where they had together conducted an attack on a communication (possibly telephone) line.²⁹

This story might or might not be true, but in any case it shows what kind of heroism the witnesses knew was expected of party members. The first purges after the Second World War were not against non-believers in the communist utopia, but against those who had been in some way involved with the Nazis. Amir Weiner has shown that in western Ukraine under similar conditions there were unrealistically high expectations on the population as Soviet citizens. Those who had not been prepared to die in the fight for Soviet power, but who had survived the four years of German occupation, were automatically suspect.³⁰ The concept of the ideal Soviet citizen who consistently fought against the Nazi occupation was used in Estonia as well, and suspicions against Estonians were aggravated by the presence of the largely German culture of the area that under the Russian Empire had been the Baltic provinces of Estland, Livland, and Courland, and by the local support for German resistance to the Soviet advance in 1944. It was not enough to be captured—one had to try to escape, and if one was free, one had to resist actively. All the witnesses had spent time in jail or labour camp with Hans N. In spite of their efforts, Hans N. did not get his party membership card back. The decision reads:

...not to reinstate him on the grounds that comrade N. stayed on German occupied territory without receiving orders to that effect, having the possibility to leave. Moreover his conduct in prison remains unclear.³¹

²⁹ ERAF F.19, Op. 2, Vol. 30: 4–9.

³⁰ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 160–62.

³¹ ERAF F.19, Op. 2, Vol. 30: 3.

Though Hans N. was not a party member, he was placed in charge of a local industry, and subsequently became chairman of the Executive Committee. He surrounded himself with men who apparently had been working at the same sawmill as he or had been members of underground socialist groups already in the 1930's during the authoritarian regime in Estonia. The Southern Township was slow in the task of pointing out kulaks, and despite being a large and relatively wealthy township the Executive Committee only suggested six families on their list in the first round of the campaign. They had to take a fair amount of abuse from their superiors because of this decision.³² The local party leadership seems to have consisted of the same group of workers, previously Social Revolutionaries. They maintained a united front and did not obey orders from above more than necessary. It seems, however, that they had some support at the local level, since they were the only township leadership that survived throughout the years 1944–1949, and some held on to their positions until the age of retirement. The cohesion and cooperation between the local party and administration—demonstrated by the attendance of both at most meetings—seems to have been effective in warding off pressures from the higher levels.³³

There were doubts as to the loyalty of this local group of council and Communist Party officials, doubts that were expressed in the course of the dekulakisation campaign. Such doubts were raised by a local communist in a letter to the cadre division of the party, as early as 1946. The sawmill workers who had joined the Communist Party were in reality Social Democrats, he wrote, and ideologically leaning towards the right. Their work after the war had been sloppy, in spite of the fact that there were “bandits” or forest brethren in the township and fascist forces were agitating against Soviet rule. The letter writer had several times offered to work together with the party instructor and Hans N. to put things right, but they had not been interested. It was true, he wrote, that Hans N. was not taking undue advantage of his position, nor was he drinking too much, but at work he was “too soft of character”—a heavy hand (*kõva käsi*) was lacking.³⁴

³² VilMA F.507, Op. 1, Vol. 3: 15–16.

³³ VilMA, F.136, Op. 1, Vol. 15 and onwards. It is called “EC with widened participation”.

³⁴ ERAF F.19, Op. 9, Vol. 279: 7–9.

This was a township leadership which had many Communist Party members, and still they were reluctant in their persecution of kulaks. The ideological motive for repressions did not work in this case, nor did they use their strong position to take revenge on former enemies, at least less so than other township leaders. The local government and party formed a network visiting each other's meetings, and they actually seem to have used cohesiveness in order to ward off persecution. The evidence available about their work in the period 1947–1949 shows these men as poor bureaucrats and unambitious administrators. They never recorded discussions about kulaks in the minutes of meetings, although some kulak families were added to the county lists.³⁵ This could indicate that Hans N. and his colleagues did not want to leave traces, and might have thought that the campaign was not morally right. However, there is no evidence to indicate what their actual thoughts about the anti-kulak campaign were. They could just as well have considered the campaign as dangerous for local peace, or have been afraid of the vindictiveness of the peasantry, as they could have been morally upset about the persecution. The sources do not support any of these hypothetical motives.

5.4. The Ambitious Bureaucrat

Evald Ö. was the son of landless peasants, working in Viljandi County as a sharecropper, the least advantageous form of rent. Six years of elementary schooling was, according to his papers, his only education. His war record was unusual—he was in the Estonian army during the communist coup in June 1940 and was transferred to the Red Army. He was released in June 1941, just before the German attack. He spent the war years farming together with his parents. The Waffen-SS tried to recruit him in March 1944, but he ran away and hid in the forest. As a civil government was set up, he was appointed first deputy

³⁵ Comparing the personal kulak files to the minutes, both in VilMA, one exception was when a member of the EC wanted to challenge the kulak status of two persons, VilMA F.136, Op. 1, Vol. 63: 17; VilMA F.136, Op. 1, Vol. 75: 14.

chairman, and later, chairman of the Eastern Township. He was not a member of any organisation linked to the Communist Party.³⁶

Evald Ö.'s work was surveyed several times. In a 1945 evaluation he was characterised as ambitious and active, but lacking political schooling.³⁷ Another undated evaluation stated that he took his work seriously, and that he had not committed political errors in the land reform of 1945 or the fight against the enemies of Soviet power. Moreover, he had actively helped the security forces to catch Estonian men hiding in the woods, and he was appreciated among the people.³⁸ In October 1947 the county Executive Committee chairman said that he was exacting and had organisational talent. The Eastern Township had been among the first to fulfil state demands on lumbering and grain collection.³⁹ The repeated evaluations of him are probably not incidental; maybe his biography was seen as inadequate. Perhaps he was screened because he showed no interest in the Communist Party.

Indeed, it is clear from the documents preserved in the archives that the books of the Eastern Township were well kept, that the Executive Committee held meetings more often than the other two townships I have studied in depth, and the minutes are more distinct and detailed—in sum, the work of this Executive Committee was more ambitious. When a decision had not been carried out, the responsible person was immediately summoned to give an explanation, whereas the other townships regularly just took the same decision once more.⁴⁰ The dekulakisation campaign was conducted along the same principles. The entire administration, including village deputies and village soviets, was drawn into the process, and the lists of kulaks were filled swiftly so that almost a fifth of the farm families ended up on them. This was more than had been asked for, as if Evald Ö. and his staff thought the required repression was inadequate.

When the Executive Committee had its meetings about kulaks, it had been recommended that other activists should be present when kulak declarations were discussed, but there were mostly the officials and

³⁶ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 20–24.

³⁷ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 25.

³⁸ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 26.

³⁹ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 29.

⁴⁰ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 55/65; 37.

people who had been called upon. Many kulaks in the Eastern Township were later released in the “kulak courts”, and the Executive Committee and Evald Ö. were criticised for providing insufficient material about the accused families.⁴¹ It is not surprising that he had enemies, but it might be more surprising that the local Communist Party was among them. Evald Ö. was most frequently accused of not being politically reliable, that he worked in his own interest and people he appointed to responsible positions in kolkhozes later turned out to be kulaks.⁴²

Evald Ö. was efficient, but in the wrong way. His organisational skills were used in a traditional fashion, working together with his employees but not letting in the riff-raff of activists and party members. In a similar vein, he appointed to leadership positions in the kolkhozes people who were knowledgeable about agricultural work and organisation. Twice in this way he happened to appoint people under suspicion of being kulaks. The educational and training background that he claimed—only primary school and work as a farmhand—can be questioned given his elegant handwriting and faultless language. Indeed, he appeared to be an old-fashioned civil servant. But how was it possible for him to look away from the fact that the kulak lists he so eagerly compiled led to other human beings’ economic ruin, political persecution and social exclusion?

Again, ideological motives will not explain the severe level of persecution in this township, since Evald Ö. had chosen not to become a party member. His overambitious attitude might have something to do with the fact that he had lived as a young man in Estonia throughout the German occupation. He claimed that he had been able to hide in the woods to escape German conscription. However, such cases normally were under suspicion, so he might have been frightened and therefore tried to ward off suspicion by overacting his part of the persecution. Evald Ö. was leader of the local anti-kulak campaign, and there are no traces in the sources of local pressure on him to top up the number of kulak families. It is also hard to imagine that peer pressure to increase the length of kulak lists should appear among the local population or inside the council system where he worked. Pressure from above, and

⁴¹ ERAF F.19, Op. 9, Vol. 16: 17; VilMA F.599, Op. 1S, Vol. 4: 67.

⁴² ERAF F.19, Op. 5, Vol. 389: 38–39; ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 2: 6–7; ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 7: 3.

eventually his enemies in the local party, were clearly present, and these might have brought about and increased the level of repression in his township. Another possibility is that he simply possessed bureaucratic ambition and a will to please. The opportunities for rapid advancement available to young men in that period might have been an incentive.

5.5. The Tender Wolf

The cases of the chairmen in the Southern and Eastern Townships seem to have been rather clearcut, one being a reluctant oppressor, the other over fulfilling his duties, as their marks in the local kulak lists can show. The ordinary participants seem to have been cast in their roles more by chance. One example is that of a demobilised soldier who had not chosen the Red Army, but had been drafted because he happened to be of the right age and was not quick enough to escape. If he had survived a number of veritable war-time slaughters, such as at Velikye Luki, the liberation of Leningrad, the Blue Mountains near Narva and the fire fights on the Curonian peninsula, then in the demobilisation he could be trained to be a local administrator.

Valter K., like the other Executive Committee chairmen, was a local boy. In his biography submitted to the party he states that his parents were landless and that he had only primary schooling, which might or might not be true. He did his regular military service in 1940 in the Estonian army and after the putsch and the illegal annexation his unit, together with the whole army, became part of the Red Army. At the beginning of war, the army detachments were evacuated to the Soviet Union, where they were dispersed. Many soldiers served in labour battalions in kolkhozes in distant parts of the Soviet Union. There they suffered from a severe lack of food and from a shortage of housing. Many of those who shared Valter K.'s fate have witnessed that work in the labour battalions was no better than in the labour camps of the Gulag. Officers of Estonian origin who were afraid their compatriots would perish in the foreign environment, formed Estonian army units in 1942. This made for an immense improvement to their situation; the demoralised soldiers were reasonably fed, received medical care and began military training. When they were sent off to the front, inadequately equipped, the officers emphasised that this was their possibility to get home. The battles they

fought, in particular at Velikye Luki, were devastating, and less than half of the original detachments survived in some cases.⁴³

Thus, Valter K. spent the war years fighting, and he was wounded in the liberation of Leningrad. He joined the Communist Party in 1945, after the war was over, which probably meant that he was not very eager to join, but had learned that the possibilities of advancement were good if one was a party member. He was not released from the army until 1947, having earned several distinctions. In filtration camp he had probably gone through training as an administrator, because he was immediately appointed chairman of the Executive Committee of the Northern Township, close to his home village.⁴⁴ As a Red Army veteran he was considered trustworthy and knowledgeable about the Soviet system, and he had the additional advantage of not having lived on German occupied territory, so that his war conduct could be verified.

The level of persecution of kulaks in the Northern Township was “normal”—not unexpected for its time and place. Valter K. did what was expected of him, no more, no less. In a survey of his work, the county Executive Committee chairman wrote in 1948 that “he lacked a steady character”, he did not demand discipline from his subordinates, he was a weak leader and his political schooling needed improvement. In particular, he was too soft on “kulak elements”.⁴⁵ Indeed, Valter K. indulged in the practice of writing letters in support of kulak families, described in Chapter 3. He had signed the kulak form as the individual responsible, and later he wrote a letter to say that the same family should not be considered kulak. This was a widespread practice that higher echelons of Soviet Estonia several times denounced and finally forbade party members and officials to use. Valter K. was, however, the only one in this material to both denounce and defend the same people.⁴⁶ He was also accused of omitting information from kulak files,

⁴³ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 3: 172–209; F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 6: 10–24 for instance verify the factual outline of heroic accounts of numerous memorial books like *Velikije Luki*, *Tehumardi*, *Kuramaa*. There are also life stories written after the demise of the Soviet Union telling more or less the same story, see Kõresaar (ed.), *Soldiers of Memory*.

⁴⁴ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 113–17.

⁴⁵ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 120.

⁴⁶ VilMA F.599, Op. 2, Vol. 251: file 250.

which had resulted in some families having been unjustly released by the kulak court. In April 1948 he received the following warning:

I warn you that you will be held personally responsible for sloppy or slow behaviour in investigating and presenting (Est. *vormistamine*) relevant material on kulak households before the given time limit to the County Executive Committee. [Signed by the chairman Ermus and secretary of the county Executive Committee.]⁴⁷

Another instance of his hesitation at carrying out acts of repression is more anecdotal. In his township was a woman whose husband had been arrested as an “enemy of the people”. Valter K. apparently had a soft spot for her, because her farm had not been reduced to the usual five to seven hectares. Moreover, he wrote an affidavit releasing her from lumbering duties, helped her to deliver the amount of firewood she was due and gave her some extra firewood from the local horse and machine depot. In 1948, after being accused of favouring her as an enemy of the people, he was obliged to reduce her farm and send her to work in the forest like everybody else.⁴⁸ Such incidents, together with the fact that the Northern Township did not fulfil lumbering and grain collection norms, attracted the attention of his superiors and resulted in disciplinary measures. Valter K. was also in a struggle with the local party instructor and accused him of wanting to take over his job.⁴⁹ Still, he was not released or fired as the Executive Committee chairman. He survived the kulak campaign and the deportation, and still had the support of the county Executive Committee in December 1949.⁵⁰

5.6. Persecute or Perish

In the West, few people realise what it meant to live between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the Second World War. All the smaller countries in East Central Europe had to suffer the conse-

⁴⁷ VilMA F.133, Op. 1, Vol. 20: 2.

⁴⁸ ERAF F.408, Op. 2, Vol. 1: 28; VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 4: 120.

⁴⁹ ERAF F.408, Op. 2, Vol. 1: 30.

⁵⁰ ERAF F.19, Op. 5, Vol. 399: 222–23.

quences of this position, each in its own way, and several, like Estonia, were occupied by both aggressive powers and twice experienced the war front passing through their homeland. In the periods of occupation, the population was solicited and often forced to take sides with one power—and then subsequently they were severely punished by the other. Only a few moral heroes withstood all such attempts, others chose to leave the country, while many people submitted to pressures and participated to some extent. Not even those who participated were, however, spared from repression by the power they accommodated.

The consequences of the cycle of revenge will be illustrated by the story of a young woman, Linda T. She was still a girl during the war when she left school to work on the family farm. The Germans had recruited her father at some point in the period 1941 to 1944, to the home guard *Omakaitse*. When the Red Army returned to Estonia he was arrested as an “enemy of the people” in May 1945. As a consequence of this, the whole family was punished; and the normal penalty for such families was for their farm to be reduced to seven hectares and all cattle except one cow taken from them by the Soviet authorities. After this, the farm was so small that the family could no longer live on its yield, so while her mother, grandmother and little brother stayed on the farm, Linda T, now age 18, had to look for additional work.

She found employment at the newly organised village soviet, as a secretary. This sounds a little odd, that the soviet should hire the daughter of an “enemy of the people”. But at that moment there was a great lack of cadres, and the locally recruited administration was itself far from being ideologically pure. Having an “enemy of the people” for a father still could be dangerous; perhaps Linda T. chose actively to hide in the bosom of the enemy. When she had been working for some time, she married and changed her surname, and she might have thought she had shaken off the possibility of being linked with her father.⁵¹

Linda T. worked in one of the villages of the Eastern Township, where her family lived. A year after she started work, the village soviet was charged with the task of composing lists of kulaks in its area. A year later, in 1948, the chairman of the village soviet quit to start

⁵¹ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 5: 174–87, 216–20.

a kolkhoz. Linda T. had apparently been a diligent worker, since she was appointed to be the new chairman. Twenty years old, she was now asked to decide over the fate of her fellow villagers. She did what was asked of her; fourteen families in her village were deported to Siberia, and no fewer than 45 families were on the lists she had helped to compose under the supervision of Evald Ö.⁵²

As she was busy pointing out kulaks, the security forces composed another list of people to be deported. This list was comprised of so-called nationalists, considered to be politically dangerous for the Soviet Union. Families of the “enemies of the people” regularly were registered on these lists. This was not the job of Linda T., but, would she have known that her mother, grandmother and little brother were on that other section of the deportation list? Is it probable that she did not know? In any case, she had not warned her family—or was unable to do so. In the early morning of April 25, 1949, the deportation squad knocked on the family’s door and all three were sent away. Perhaps she had turned her back on her supposedly disreputable family, perhaps she did not know about the pending deportation. But later, she was herself exposed as the daughter of an “enemy of the people”, expelled from work and punished.⁵³

Linda T.’s fate shows the spiral of revenge and retribution that was specific for this area between the warring great powers. Caught in this spiral, some people could choose to hide in the disguise of the best friends of the Soviet Union, and to demonstrate their loyalty, they could sacrifice other people. Maybe, to begin with, the father of Linda T. had a choice. It is just as probable that he was subject to some violence in the first Soviet year of 1940–1941, which prompted him to cooperate with the German occupiers. His daughter, on the other hand, did not have many choices. She could persecute or be persecuted, and as it turned out, both happened to her in turn.

If the family had not been classified as “enemies of the people”, she would have gone on working on the family farm. As it was, she was hired by an indiscriminate local administration. It has not been possible to see if the employers did it in protest against the purges,

⁵² VilMA F.599, Op. 2, compared to the database Population losses. Kulak families were designated with a K, political deportees an N on these lists. See also VilMA F.507, Op. 1, Vol. 6.

⁵³ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 5: 178.

but it seems improbable that the village soviet chairman hiring her did not know her background. He might just as well have been desperate to find people willing to work for the Soviet authorities. More documentation of a private nature, and access to the records of the security forces would be necessary to determine more precisely what the situation was in 1946. The casualness of the village soviet workers, however, seems quite authentic. They discussed some kulak cases, mixed in with repairs of grain threshers and the eternal fight to be on time with the forced deliveries of lumber and grain to the central powers.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, it is a fact that Linda T., in spite of her background, did not resign or look for other work when the task of repression was laid on the local administration in Estonia.

Many young men and women took jobs in the local administration upon leaving school. Disciplinary cases against them were made often, and these are found in their files. Charges included absenteeism and inefficiency, and many were charged with drunkenness. This does not speak for a happy and enthusiastic participation. Still, they did participate and their work turned out to be detrimental to their neighbours.

5.7. Persecution as a Social Process

Participation in the class struggle was expected from “the masses”, not only from the professionals charged with security, or even the “class conscious” Communist Party members. To what extent this actually was realised in Estonia in the 1940’s is a question that at this stage can be answered only with approximations and suppositions. Within kulak files and complaints from the public held in the local administration and local party archives, the number of written denouncements turn out to be surprisingly small, while in contrast the letters of support are numerous—from party members, members of the local administration, even NKGB employees. These letters, and the “kulak courts” were the main arenas for negotiations about right or wrong in the kulak campaign.

The institutional rules were designed to induce participation. Who was to be a kulak was decided with the involvement of “village

⁵⁴ VilMA F.507, Op. 1, Vol. 6.

deputies”, the lowest level of the administration, persons charged with gathering the information on, and surveying the labour and other duties of some ten families. Then the village soviets had their opinion about local families and their eventual kulak status. The chairman of the township Executive Committee, who also made the lists, signed formal papers with written characterisations of kulaks. These were then handed over to the county Executive Committee, which discussed the cases once more and sometimes asked for changes. The county Executive Committee also discussed the appeals against the accusation, submitted by practically every kulak family. If the county committee did not support the appeal, further appeal was made to the Estonian SSR Council of Ministers.

When kulak status had been decided, the formal procedure was that kulaks had to pay the special tax, handled by the local tax committee, which also took charge of the collection of taxes. When tax arrears occurred, the unpaid taxes were handed over to the People’s courts, which decided to carry through expropriations in exchange for unpaid taxes. These decisions were executed and again produced a number of documents, signed by witnesses, representatives of the kulak families, and others. Finally, the goods were sold or transferred to local kolkhozes or settlers. In this way the entire local administration participated in the process against the kulaks, as demonstrated in Chapter 3. The number of forms and signatures made in the process is often staggering. The process was open, publicised in the newspapers, and discussed at the local level—an approach quite different from the unexpected knock on the door in the early morning hours that was the mark of the security forces. The responsibility was broad—many people participated in the decision of each case, which probably created a feeling of less personal responsibility, and also certain cohesion among all those who participated but were uncomfortable with the whole process. These feelings have only rarely been voiced.⁵⁵

This broad participation included a mechanism of social control that Jan T. Gross wrote about concerning Poland in 1939, and Chris-

⁵⁵ In 1999, the Estonian playwright Merle Karusoo wrote a play based on authentic material, which was called *The Deporters* and caused much discussion. It is however centred on the act of deportation, not the preceding procedure.

topher Browning calls peer pressure in a quite different context among the German auxiliary police.⁵⁶ It was surely also at work in the persecutions in Viljandi county, as it probably would have been possible to abstain from participation without punishment; at least no such punishments have been recorded. But if the entire local administration in all its different parts was involved, then anyone stepping back and refusing to participate would not only make a statement for themselves, but also state that everybody else was doing something wrong too. Such a statement would mean risking being exposed to the same kind of social exclusion as the kulaks experienced. Bitter jokes and silent curses were probably preferred as outlets.

Denunciations typically were directed at the officials, not the “class enemies”, and can therefore be understood as a form of resistance or counter-strategy rather than compliance. The civil complaints, which seemed like a promising source material, are petty and complicated, probably similar to neighbour’s quarrels everywhere, not anything specific to the communist system.⁵⁷ In that sense, general participation was not obvious in Estonia.

Still, local administrations were locally recruited; most officials were not yet Communist Party members. When repressive tasks were conferred upon them, they were carried out. It is possible to find documentary evidence of a public reaction, but only after the deportations in March 1949.⁵⁸ Two different images of the local administration can be posited in the light of the sources. One is that it was grudgingly accepted in the community, with the exception of smaller insurgent networks close to the forest brotherhoods. The other is that of an isolated group, hated by all, crouching in makeshift offices, having to carry weapons when they went outdoors, as the more heroic accounts of the forest brotherhood would have it. My impression is that the people responsible for carrying out the everyday tasks of village soviets, township Executive Committees and other committees were not isolated, and that the attempts of the Soviet regime to spread the responsibility for the campaign and the decisions involved were successful. At

⁵⁶ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 188–189; Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 114–22.

⁵⁷ Complaints in letters to the Executive Committees and local Communist Party basic organisations.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 6 for the conflicts following deportations.

this moment the local community was not united against Soviet officials; it was still negotiating the boundaries of the permissible.

Writing about the same question in Poland in 1939, Jan T. Gross finds that the new administration there consisted of certain networks from the old opposition.⁵⁹ In Viljandi County, it was not so easy to find networks or closed groups of Soviet supporters and enemies. If unusual family names are used as an indicator, members of the same family turn up both as participants and victims. There was thus a difference between Estonia in 1944–1949 and Poland in 1939, which might be accounted for by the German occupation that occurred prior the time my study begins. At that moment, pro-communist forces withdrew to the Soviet Union and participated in the war with enormous losses, and the Nazis often killed those who did not escape. The recent Estonian presidential committee assessing the losses during that period indicate local communists and other Estonians as the second largest group of victims of the German occupation.⁶⁰ There might thus have been pro-Soviet networks in Viljandi county in 1940, which had been dispersed by 1944.

The records kept by the Soviet administration, which dealt with the extent of repression have been a puzzle for many researchers. They are much richer and more eloquent than might be expected, even if they were not professionally kept or always reliable at face value. It seems apparent that there was an ambition to create a system of justice of sorts, a system which was proletarian and aggressive and which made room for violence and class struggles. Still it seems to have been important to legitimise the repression, not only through propaganda and ideology, but also through documentation, witnesses, signatures, and a judicial procedure. Reading the requisition forms, I asked myself several times: in whose interest they stood? The dispossessed kulak

⁵⁹ Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 117–19.

⁶⁰ Report of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity, Phase II, The German Occupation of Estonia 1941–44, www.historycommission.ee/temp/conclusions.htm. About 15,000 Red Army POWs perished, as well as 6,000 Estonian nationals of whom many were accused of having Communist sympathies, about 1,000 Jews remaining in Estonia and at least 5,000 Jews sent to Estonia from Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Poland.

certainly did not need them. The neighbours, used as witnesses, were hardly fooled by the form and the required paragraphs of text. I have concluded that the forms primarily were important for the person making the requisition. It must have been some consolation that the requisition officer was not just a thief, but was fulfilling a larger purpose of some kind, with backing from the authorities.

The endeavour to hold to and maintain judicial forms and procedures was a significant feature. It was a legitimisation, supported with arguments pertaining to the class struggle. In the debates of the 1980s and 1990s about the character of Soviet society, violence was often seen as its main feature, leading to unpredictable totalitarianism without a purpose. The effort to maintain procedures and punish those who acted on their own would instead support the other argument, which holds that the Soviet experience was in fact an attempt at building a different society, intentionally holding to another set of rules than does liberal society. Violence was part of this society, and there was also a specific notion of class justice.

5.8. Communist Party and Councils in Viljandi County

Since the first independent empirical study of the local level in the Soviet Union was published by Merle Fainsod, the Communist Party has been considered the leading institution, the place where the decisions were made. The administration, meanwhile, has been perceived simply as an executive institution, doing what it was told to do, which on the ideological level is probably correct. Jerry Hough has specified this for the local level, saying that the Communist Party on each specific level was much stronger than the local administration and had the task “to unite, to direct and to lead the soviet and economic agencies.”⁶¹

Still, the overlapping and competing functions of the governmental system and the Communist Party have been identified as

⁶¹ Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*; Hough, “The Soviet Concept of the Relationship between the Lower Party Organs and the State Administration,” 228–29.

a problematic and perhaps even dangerous feature of the Soviet system.⁶² Stephen Kotkin could already see in his material from the 1930's that the Communist Party was in the perilous position of becoming increasingly superfluous as the institutions of the new society were gaining strength. In a materialist perspective, the industrial complexes and the kolkhozes were in charge of the resources, the ministries decided over economic planning, while the party could only give general outlines. The party kept launching purification and class struggle campaigns, which could be seen as its way of setting the agenda and asserting its importance. Still, very few studies have been made of this important and far from simple division of power, specific to the Communist system.

How did the balance work in the context of my case study? We know that few local Executive Committee leaders were members of the Communist Party, and that there were extensive campaigns persuading them to join.⁶³ With a view toward the central level of power, German historian David Feest has maintained that in the second half of the 1940s the Estonian Communist Party was very weak, whereas local Estonian functionaries still were at work in the republic's Council of Ministers.⁶⁴ What did this look like on the local level, and what role did the Communist Party have in dekulakisation? In newly conquered Estonia there was another aspect to the relationship, as the biographies of local actors have shown. The local administration consisted of local people, that is, the conquered. The Communist Party also had an important element of locally born and bred members, but who more frequently had direct connections to the Soviet Union, through the Red Army, wartime evacuation or simply having lived or studied in Russia as it became the Soviet Union. To some extent, they were power brokers in the relationship with central Soviet authorities, between conquered and conquerors.

⁶² Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 286.

⁶³ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 133.

⁶⁴ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 57–59. This is also the conclusion of Valdur Ohmann, "Põhimõisted" in Tarvel, *Eestimaa kommunistliku partei*, 14: "...power had been concentrated in the Council of Ministers to a higher degree than the party leadership." [Est. "...ministrite nõukogusse oli võim koondunud suuremal määral kui partei juhtkonda."]

Looking at the local administration and the local Communist Party in the first years, 1944 to 1945, the main impression is one of weakness. Already in 1944, Executive Committees of the local government had been appointed in all townships of Viljandi County, but “elections” to the local soviet system did not occur until 1948. The townships were subdivided into village soviets, which began administrative work in 1945–46. At the lowest level there were village deputies.⁶⁵ People in the administration were very frequently replaced. Some were charged with drunkenness and abuse of power. Quite a few were charged with collaboration with the Germans after the initial purges; others were simply regarded as useless. This situation had however changed by 1946–47, and a stabilisation of personnel took place after the first years.⁶⁶ One important reason for this was the inflow of demobilised Estonian Red Army fighters. After the filtration camps that all soldiers went through after the war, some were offered courses in local administration.⁶⁷ Several of these took positions in Viljandi County. Former Red Army soldiers were regarded as reliable in two different senses. First, they had had no opportunity to collaborate with the Germans, as opposed to those who stayed behind or defected. Second, they had been, since 1940, socialised into the Soviet system, its discourse and value system in the most highly regarded organisation of all, the Red Army. Those who were appointed locally were, moreover, natives of Viljandi county, and familiar with local conditions. Other administrative workers by their side had some experience, and had been put to the test.

The local Communist Party organisation at the county level seems to have been the crucial holder of power in the early years of 1944–1946, in occupied Estonia. They supervised everything and took most of the initiatives. Still, the party was small and grew slowly. It was, difficult to set up a youth organisation at all.⁶⁸ It was expected that the

⁶⁵ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 2: 4 from 1944.

⁶⁶ Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 176.

⁶⁷ Tarkhova, “Röda Armén och ‘den nya kursen’” [The Red Army and the “new course”], 20.

⁶⁸ ERAF F.286, Op. 1, Vol. 1: 3, 19 (minutes of the Komsomol bureau of Viljandi County); also mentioned in ERAF F.19, Op. 3, Vol. 1: 9 (minutes of the Viljandi County party organisation).

Communist youth organisation should volunteer for needed tasks—for instance form militias. Local branches of Communist Party organisations often consisted of a small number of members and candidate members. Of the three specially studied townships, one had occasional minutes from 1945 onwards; another started a local party organisation in August 1947, and the third in August 1948.⁶⁹ Party membership or candidate membership was normally indicated on the attendance lists of meetings within the party, but also in the local administration.

In one sense, however, the Communist Party played a decisive role throughout the period, since its cadre section, or cadre official, had the important responsibility of selecting administrators in the county. The cadre section of the party thus controlled the appointments and released people from posts on the township level, the lowest level of the *nomenklatura*.⁷⁰ Moreover, the party closely supervised administrative work during the early years of Soviet power. The Soviet land reform of 1945, for instance, was formally conducted by local land committees, appointed by the local administrations, but the Communist Party took on the role of controlling, and directing the process. Township Executive Committees reported the progress of the land reform on a monthly basis to the county party leadership.⁷¹ In the dekulakisation campaign, however, the role of the Communist Party seems to have been much more restricted, mainly due to the wish of Executive Committee chairmen and personnel to keep them out.

The Communist Party could use its influence also in a different way, by using the fuzzy category of activists. Party instructors in each township were supposed to recruit and organise activists, and instructors' success at their work was monitored partly according to their results in this task. These activists were then to be included at Executive Committee meetings selecting kulaks during the campaign

⁶⁹ ERAF F.408, Op. 1, Vol. 1; 811–1–2; 421–1–1.

⁷⁰ Standard procedure, according to Tarvel, *Eestimaa kommunistliku partei*, 105. See also Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, 99; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 298.

⁷¹ See ERAF F.19, Op. 3, Vol. 1: 7. 17 October 1944 where the first secretary of the Viljandi County party is charged with organising Land Commissions in each township. In the party minutes of 1944–45, reports of the advance of the land reform are recurring, see for instance ERAF F.19, Op. 3, Vol. 13.

and thus represent a kind of “voice of the people”. The activist notion has been scrutinized by Estonian historian Indrek Paavle, who explains that all Komsomol members and workers in the council system were expected to participate as activists. The people working in the organisations subordinated to the township, such as the schools, the “people’s houses” (Est. *rahvamajad*), libraries, post offices also should see themselves as activists. Moreover, settlers receiving land were expected to participate, as well as demobilised soldiers and local intellectuals. However, this was mostly a paper construction, as there was often a shortage of people wanting to do the actual work at hand, not to speak of participating in more general events on a voluntary basis.⁷²

In the Southern Township, the documents revealing the relations between administration and party show no traces of contention between councils and Communist Party. Instead, when the Executive Committee chairman was investigated prior to inclusion in the Communist Party, the local party representatives supported his application. Representatives of both local power holders were present at most meetings, and seem to have agreed on most issues. From their biographies it seems that they were recruited among the group of former sawmill workers that had known each other at least since the first Soviet year 1940–41. There were complaints both against the party secretary and the Executive Committee chairman in letters to the authorities. The Executive Committee chairman was also under pressure from above to intensify the persecution of kulaks in 1948 and the beginning of 1949; still, no one in the leadership of the Southern Township was removed or submitted to disciplinary action. Their perseverance may be due to their inner cohesion, which is visible in the minutes of the Executive Committee as well as the party.⁷³ The significant result of this local peace seems to have been that they could keep their kulak lists as short as possible, exposing fewer families to the hardships of the exorbitant taxes, social exclusion and political persecution. In the final instance, the quota of families deported was almost as high as in other townships. But meanwhile, the persecution in terms of sheer numbers was less widespread than in the other two cases. The

⁷² Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 84.

⁷³ ERAF F.421, Op. 1; VilMA F.136, Op.

local leaders of the Southern Township, with their working class background, might have been an ideal set of Soviet officials, but they did not indulge in the practices of over fulfilment of quotas.

In the Northern Township there was a tenuous relationship between the Executive Committee chairman and the local party secretary. Both could feel somewhat threatened by their mutual animosity. The Executive Committee chairman expressed a feeling of being supervised and controlled, which probably influenced the extent of persecution. The minutes of the party organisation of the Northern Township are missing for the period between January and August 1949, which might mean that someone later removed traces of the participation of party members in the deportation. But when the Executive Committee chairman was scolded because of slow implementation of dekulakisation, this snub was issued by the County Executive Committee, not the party.⁷⁴ This case of uneasy cohabitation between party and councils resulted in kulak lists that were close to the county average in length.

Finally, in the Eastern Township, a local party organisation was not formed until in 1948, when a new instructor was installed, but from that point on, the rivalry started. The Executive Committee chairman was not a party member, and the party had been weak during most of the campaign. The Executive Committee chairman had been overzealous in his hunt for kulaks, but that was not visibly due to party pressure. The new party secretary instead accused him of friendly relations with kulaks and of making personal gains. So the conflict in 1948 did not revolve explicitly around kulak persecution, but had more to do with the Executive Committee chairman and his ambitions and possible fears. In Estonia in 1948–49, no one dared accuse him of going too far; restrictiveness towards kulaks was not considered an appropriate measure.

In my limited study, there was thus one case of peace, two of rivalry. Only the first case gave positive results in terms of restricting violence. In the two cases where a power struggle took place neither the Executive Committee nor the local party organisation won the struggle. There was apparently no clear hierarchical relation between local government and party in practice. The local administration took charge and implemented orders from above more independently from

⁷⁴ See page 178 above.

the party than earlier. The Council of Ministers issued orders and corresponded directly with them, and it seems that this link was more important than with the local party hierarchy. In party minutes and other documents from that period, new campaigns were discussed and slogans were formulated and circulated, but this was made in more general terms. The performance of local councils was sometimes criticised, at other times approved of, but they no longer reported their activities to the party organisation on a day-to-day basis.⁷⁵

Typical instead for this period is conflict between the party secretary and the Chairman of the Executive Committee on the local level. The accusation that the party secretary tried to meddle in, or take over the job of the chairman of the Executive Committee was frequently heard in this period.⁷⁶ It seems significant that in concrete cases of conflict in the Northern and Eastern Townships, the local administration and the chairman of the Executive Committee did not lose the fight with the party secretary.

5.9. The Security Forces

Another important actor in the mass campaigns—the professionals of the forces of the Ministry of the Interior and the militia—merit more study. To date, their activity has been largely an obscure area, and unfortunately this will also be the case with my local study, even if the few occasions when the security forces become visible are discussed.⁷⁷ Those who joined the security forces knew what kind of work they had to do. In one of the letters of the local security forces to the party cell, a man wrote: “As a former factory worker I chose voluntarily to work under the direction of the party in the NKVD organs.” The “blood of killed comrades” had prompted him to go on.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ The Township Communist Party organisations did not receive such reports.

⁷⁶ ERAF F.408, Op. 2, Vol. 1: 28; VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 82: 10–12. Both accuse the party secretary of trying to take over their work, while neglecting the political tasks. On a more general level, this is confirmed by Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine Eestis*, 161–65.

⁷⁷ So does Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 341.

⁷⁸ ERAF F.448, Op. 2, Vol. 8: 1.

The security organisation, like the Communist Party, was interested in cadre questions and the appointments of administrators. Their main tasks at this point were, however, to purge Estonia of German collaborators, and to fight the armed resistance to Soviet rule. This resistance was stronger in the first years, subsided somewhat by 1947, but made a last effort in reaction to the deportations of nationalists and kulaks in 1949.⁷⁹ There are few operative documents left of their local activities, but there was a local party branch organisation of the special sector of the Ministry of Interior, and a Komsomol organisation that have left minutes of their meetings in which local affairs are mirrored.

While the local administration and the local party branches were manned by local people, who were often born within Viljandi county, the local NKGB party section was heavily dominated by Russians in 1944–45, as far as can be determined by individuals' names. The uneasy cooperation between these levels can be imagined; unfamiliar with the locality and unable to speak with the population, the security forces were dependent on the local administration and local party for information, while the latter were under surveillance of the security force. After a year, about 40 per cent of party members in the county NKGB party section had Estonian names; their place of birth was not stated.⁸⁰ By 1948, the leading group seems to have become predominantly Estonian.⁸¹

The tasks of maintaining equipment, arranging for benefits and securing discipline were surveyed by the primary party organisation of the Communist Party inside the NKGB, while the work of the militia and security forces was not discussed there in general terms. The minutes convey a situation in which the militia was badly equipped and unable to receive the privileges they had been promised, and having continuous problems of discipline.⁸² In disciplinary matters, glimpses of everyday situations are given. In February 1949,

⁷⁹ Laar, "1949. Aasta märtsiküüditamine..." [March deportations of 1949], 65–71; a local confirmation in ERAF F.410, Op. 2, Vol. 3: 17–18. Minutes from the local militia section.

⁸⁰ ERAF F.448, Op. 1, Vol. 15.

⁸¹ ERAF F.442, Op. 2, Vol. 5: 81–82.

⁸² ERAF F.286, Op. 4, Vol. 107: 26, 38 (Komsomol); ERAF F.410, Op. 1, Vol. 15: 1, 8 (militia local party organisation).

for instance, two different Komsomol members received disciplinary punishments because they had stolen the belongings of arrested kulaks: jackets, shoes, and underwear. Both defended themselves by saying they thought it would not matter since the victim was a class enemy.⁸³ The kulaks might have been arrested because they had not been able to pay taxes. The accusation highlights their precarious situation; the locals apparently thought they were outlaws. The fact that their underwear was stolen in both cases conveys another rather shocking detail: were they in fact naked during interrogations?

The glimpses gained from the minutes of party and Komsomol cell organisations of the security forces reveal them as poor, somewhat unruly, and ruthless people. It is not class struggle but material issues that are at the core of most problems raised. It seems obvious that those who joined these organisations expected to receive privileges. The participation of the security forces in the campaign against the kulaks cannot be accurately judged from these documents.⁸⁴ In the absence of documentation that is more to the point, I have reflected on the possibility that the kulak lists could have been prepared by the security forces and given to the local government, making the participation of the latter a pure façade. Three circumstances speak against this hypothesis: the difference between townships, the existence of kulak courts and the final screening done by the Ministry of Interior. None of these should have been necessary if the security forces had full control over the process. On the other hand, since security officers could participate as “activists” in Executive Committee meetings about kulaks at any time, they could have been active on a lower level, even if they did not often take the opportunity to do so. And we will never know to what extent the Executive Committee chairmen had informal visits from security officers, prompting them to look into the conditions of some families in the neighbourhood. That kind of behaviour seems very probable, but still would not free the local government from the responsibility of participation.

⁸³ ERAF F.286, Op. 4, Vol. 107: 26, 38.

⁸⁴ Presently documents seem to be found under other headings in the archives, whereas they were thought to be lost previously.

5.10. Why did Local People Participate?

In Soviet ideology, the masses were supposed to participate enthusiastically in the class struggle. The land reform of 1945 was intended to demonstrate to landless and poor peasants that Soviet power was on their side and was working hard to annihilate their oppressors.⁸⁵ The historical background presented in Chapter 1 shows why Estonians were unlikely to grasp the situation in the intended way. Nevertheless, those holding some kind of office went along, and a few even used the slogans and insults of the official propaganda against the kulaks, and continued to do so until the kulak families were destitute and outcast. However, expressions of belief in the communist utopia in the local material from the archives have a distinctly formal character; in them, ideology is used as a means towards ends such as being released from kulak status. The lack of ideological and political motives as explanations of individual behaviour, evident in the available literature, seems to hold true in Viljandi County too.⁸⁶ Participation was a structural phenomenon, ingrained in the kind of society that was built. It was hardly individual choice, to be explained by the evil character of an individual, and in the case of Estonia, it cannot be explained by ideological fervour either. The cultural dimension of communism, discussed in connection with the identification process as part of the class analysis below, seems to offer a better explanation.

The theses about the bureaucratic working of modern society brought forward by Zygmunt Bauman, on the other hand, finds support in these case studies. Above all, the character of the process was distinctly bureaucratic, providing the individual actor with a framework and a method, demanding no individual initiative. In addition, the bureaucratic procedure seems to have been adopted enthusiastically, in particular by the most ardent persecutor in the material, who stands out as an ambitious bureaucrat.

⁸⁵ ERAF F.19, Op. 5, Vol. 332: 35. This was the theme for a township meeting.

⁸⁶ Closest to my investigation is that of Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 477–80.

The procedure shows that, in addition to the militia and the Communist Party, practically the entire local administration participated in the persecution of kulaks, including the Executive Committee, the tax commission, the land commission, the People's Courts, the village soviets, the village deputies. In addition, it was required that activists should participate in the crucial meetings. When the process seemed to go wrong—not many kulaks exposed, or too many kulak families presented, without a trace of the criteria given in the decree—it was blamed on the absence of activists in the process.⁸⁷ The township Executive Committees did not seem to grasp this category at first, but by 1948 a number of additional names appeared on most written records as a response to criticism. Still, judging from the names, several of these were relatives of the Committee members. Many people were involved, and each only contributed a small part of the entire process; this construction of the process might have lifted away much of the sense of personal responsibility, both in the division of labour and in the obedience to orders.

The hypotheses about peer pressure also have a bearing on the results in Viljandi county on a group level. In the process of kulak persecution within the local community, the involvement of the whole local administration made for strong social pressure. Responsibility for what happened to the kulaks was diminished through the participation of many people. At the same time, it probably became more difficult to abstain, or to be the only one to say no.

We must be cautious in drawing conclusions about the relationship between the different Soviet organs on the local level. Still, it seems that the Communist Party was not as domineering as Merle Fainsod found it to be in his investigation of the party in Smolensk in the 1930s, or as Jerry Hough later did in his work. In Estonia, the party was weak because it had a short history and because there had been repression of communists from 1924 onwards, with particular severity during the German occupation. But above all, the Bolsheviks were considered the main instrument of power, the last in a long series of conquerors. It was therefore devoid of the esteem it still enjoyed in the original parts of the Soviet Union, even if its reputation was tarnished

⁸⁷ VilMA F.318, Op. 1, Vol. 82: 42; VilMAF.507, Op. 1, Vol. 3: 16.

everywhere. The local government had the advantage of local recruitment and linguistic and ethnic belonging. As we have seen, Soviet powers tried hard to make the party and the security forces also more Estonian, in accordance with the official nationality policy. Historian David Feest confirms this tendency in the Estonian SSR.⁸⁸

More noteworthy are indications that the level of repression was not weaker because the local administration was in charge. Party members were not necessarily more vindictive against the peasantry than ambitious non-party bureaucrats or those who went along in order to conceal a spoilt biography. In the local context, there were fights between the local administration and the Communist Party, and these could be rather fierce. But it is significant that these fights did not lead to the victory of the party secretaries. Another significant indication is that in the Southern Township, where party and local administration cooperated peacefully, the repression was held at a lower level than in the townships where they were fighting. Therefore it can be concluded that the rivalry between the party and non-party local administration, a feature built into the system, could be deadly in nature.

It is even more difficult to say anything conclusive about the role of the security forces. They seem as violent and ruthless as they are normally represented to have been, but their poverty and bad conditions are nuances that should be added to the general picture. It serves as a warning against theories assuming complete control or total power in rather complicated situations.

The specific history of areas subjected to both Soviet and German occupations, which encompassed a large part of the western areas of the Soviet Union—western Ukraine, western Belarus, the Baltic states and Moldova—took the issue of vindication and old quarrels to an unprecedented level. Far beyond village quarrels, the revenge taken in the early Soviet years on anyone believed to have supported the German occupation was sanctioned at the highest levels. Its importance for the victims has been discussed in Chapter 4, but it also had repercussions on participation and on the behaviour of perpetrators. Each new ruler over the area wanted locals to do the dirty work, in

⁸⁸ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 68–70.

order to appear more legitimate, and in order to save their own troops and cadres. Recruitment was ubiquitous and sometimes fierce, using both sticks and carrots. Retaliation—hitting out at those who had supported the previous regime—made another round from 1944 to 1949. Sometimes persecutors have a motive of revenge, as one NKGB official stated. They could also have a background of German collaboration, and become persecutors in order to escape exposure, as Linda T. and possibly Evald Ö. above. The fear created by this spiral of hate and revenge is probably the most powerful motive for participation.

This backdrop is essential to understand the story of repression in Estonia and other areas with the same kind of fate. The war and the demands made on the occupied peoples is one of the main elements that the Estonian case study can contribute to the debate on atrocities of the 20th century. The Estonians had lived through the war; the society had violently changed, not once but four times within living memory—1919, 1940, 1941 and 1944, not to mention minor changes in 1917 and 1934. Each time, societal rules and expectations changed. The Soviet Union did not occupy new territories with force only, but with a whole new set of symbols, attitudes, language, dress codes, and a new civilisation, which was explicitly framed as an alternative to the previous society.⁸⁹ Propaganda explaining and imposing the new ideology, in particular the importance of class struggle, was ubiquitous. The activities of anyone in the indigenous population, along with that of their families and relatives during the war were under scrutiny. A relative drafted into the German army or living as a refugee in Sweden could become an obstacle for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, participation in the Red Army, fighting important battles such as Velikye Luki or the liberation of Leningrad, could work in their favour and excuse other “mistakes”. In this way, the class dimension and also the war performance was unavoidable for everybody trying to live in that society. In studies of the Soviet Union, the issue of “spoilt biographies” has become a major new insight. In the newly occupied territories, the same issue is even more pronounced through the general suspicion of Baltic peoples as potential enemies. This was in particular important for those in official positions, who had to display a record

⁸⁹ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 14–15.

that was flawless in the eyes of the cadre section. Moreover, the individual was made responsible for his or her family and more distant relatives as well. This “game of taking sides” had been played in the area several times already in the past years. It was impossible to live outside these categories; an argumentation using other value hierarchies would not work. However, it was not as simple as being Estonian or Russian, or having some other national identification. Not all Estonians were on the “wrong” side from the point of view of the Soviet authorities.

Hannah Arendt used a dichotomy between the fictitious reality of totalitarian regimes and the real world.⁹⁰ Today, we are not so sure about the real world and more prepared to believe in alternative ways of constructing reality. Language and powerful structuring concepts, like the use of class analysis, are important tools to guide the perception of reality. However, the image of being enclosed in a world apart also evoked by Arendt seems valid. Bolshevik language has been characterised by Jan T. Gross as rhetorical and ritualised, that it blurred the difference between descriptive and evaluative statements. Communication was dominated by assessment of good and bad, expressed as formulas. Rational dialogue was prevented through its metaphorical character; it is, for instance, impossible to logically refute the statement that someone is “a running dog of imperialism”.⁹¹ The attention paid to propaganda by the Communist Party is understandable in this perspective, as well as the importance of censorship and elimination of other, competing ways of conceptualising current events.

The information about what was good or bad, forbidden and approved was provided by the propaganda. In the Estonian Communist Party, the largest department was that of propaganda.⁹² In Viljandi County, the records of the agitprop units of the party are impressive. These local units reported monthly to the county party organisation. A township party secretary reported 900 discussions in individual households and 9 meetings at the agitprop centres (*agitpunkt*) in February 1948 alone. According to the report, 2,700 persons participated, which amounts to practically the entire population, children included. The themes discussed were the advantages of collectivisation, a promise

⁹⁰ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 392 for instance.

⁹¹ Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 236–37.

⁹² Tarvel, *Eestimaa kommunistliku partei*, 112.

to comrade Stalin about timber deliveries, and improvement of grain seeds.⁹³ In other months the themes were the international situation, or how the Soviet peoples saved Estonia from ruin. Political study circles studied topics such as the biography of comrade Stalin. Attendance at election meetings was reported, with astonishing numbers.⁹⁴ The outsized numbers were probably indications of the importance of the matter for superiors, or even attempts to protect absent neighbours.

Much attention was also given to distribution of newspapers in the reports of the propaganda committee, even if the number of subscriptions remained low until 1948.⁹⁵ The poor rhetorical quality of the surviving examples of propagandistic material seems to be in contradiction with the energy put into distribution. The propaganda effort makes sense if it is regarded not as persuasion but as a way of explaining the values and the ideology of the Soviet Union so that the new citizens would know the rules. Estonians were accustomed to adapting, as shown by the uniform personal files on cadres of the time, the frequent exposures of frauds regarding both class and war background, and the suppression of unfit relatives.⁹⁶ There are few slips of the tongue in the official documents filled in by local people.

Everyone in society had to be involved in what Stephen Kotkin calls “the identification game”. All who applied for a job or for membership in the Communist Party had to present themselves and their past in life stories and thus identify themselves in terms of the current ideology. He emphasises that while it was not necessary to believe in these categories, it was necessary to participate as if one believed.⁹⁷ In the post-war years, in the Baltic republics, there were not many who believed in communism. The legitimising function of the rhetoric was thus probably lost on the adult population. Still, they had to get jobs, negotiate membership in kolkhozes and find educational opportunities

⁹³ ERAF F.19, Op. 5, Vol. 332: 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 32, the figure given is 25,168, exceeding the population of the local town.

⁹⁵ Kinkar, “EKP tegevus...” [Educational activities of the ECP] 74, 88. Thanks to David Feest for pointing out the available data there.

⁹⁶ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K contains the personal files, for exposures see for instance VilMA 811-1-2, 5, 6.

⁹⁷ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 215–20.

for their children. In their questionnaires, class analysis was present in statements about their social background and former jobs. They were supposed to write that their parents were poor peasants or workers, and that they did not attend school for more than six years, thus using class analysis on an everyday basis.⁹⁸

The confinement in a new world view, forcefully propagated by all available means, staged by the Soviet Union, could help to explain the widespread if grudging acceptance of participation. It was difficult to resist; it seeped in with new categories, new terms and new tasks to be performed by the authorities, rather than convinced through argument. The new power could build new institutions using the ready-made model of the Soviet Union. Even if discipline was not achieved due to drunkenness and absenteeism, it worked somehow and produced a kind of peer pressure among employees. Individuals were probably often doubtful about the acts they performed, but being in the wrong also evoked defensive attitudes and cohesion. The insistence of the rulers on general participation strengthened the pressure. The arbitrariness of persecution made it clear to most people that there were no safe positions, not as bystanders nor even as perpetrators.

Still, the most powerful explanation of participation was the lack of alternatives. Participation in this kind of mass campaign was not voluntary or solicited individually, as a predominant discourse about denouncements would suggest. A denouncement demands a motive. The singling out of kulak families was instead conducted as a bureaucratic screening of the entire population, using available archives, records and censuses, and validating local knowledge. It could be conducted in different ways, as we have seen, but it is also evident that the actors in the process could be exchanged, yet the process would still go on.

⁹⁸ In the cadre files, the questionnaires were uniformly filled in.

Chapter 6

Epilogue of March 1949

The deportations sent a shock wave through society on many levels. On one hand, an intentional message was being sent. This violent act meant that there had been enough talk; the time for discussions was ended. It also sent the signal that further resistance would not be tolerated. The dependence of the deportation squads on the kulak lists compiled in the villages and townships implicated large parts of the local council system and thus acquaintances and neighbours of the victimised families. There were local officials present at the act of deportations. They were used as guides to the targeted households, and their task was also to make inventories of the deported kulak household goods. They did not know in advance what was going to happen because of the risk that they might warn the victims was seen as high. Still, their presence was visible, and no deported family would ever forget how local people showed the deportation squads—organised military and mostly outsiders—the way to their house. This implication of local people was certainly a fatal blow against trust and cohesion in the countryside. The dekulakisation process was surely intended to have this effect, even if other consequences in the form of withdrawal from society, fear and passivity were largely unintended.

In this chapter, the events following the final step of the anti-kulak campaign will be traced on the village and township level. A corollary to these events—one often described in the historical literature—is the instant collectivisation of agriculture, an avalanche of farmers joining

kolkhozes at a pace that made administrative procedures break down under the pressure. Kulak goods and farms were divided between the new kolkhozes; this of course left traces in the archival material.

However, much less is known about the kulak families that were on the tax lists, but had not been targeted for deportation. The deportations have been studied since the late 1980s, but very little attention has so far been paid to the fate of the large number of kulak households on the official lists which were not deported, but stayed in Estonia. In the three townships of this local study, this group accounted for more than half of all those on the lists. It is only to be expected that their fate was not obvious from the archival material, as it was in the interest of these families not to leave any traces of their whereabouts. It has not been possible to make a complete study, but in spite of problems in finding sources the cases that were found will be used as examples.

There were other muted, but inevitable reactions inside the system as this sharp wave of violence changed the countryside; these were clearly visible on the local level but have not caught the attention of historians. The preceding chapter evoked internal conflicts among the local groups participating in the campaign. It is not surprising that such conflicts would explode in the face of severe societal violence in which these local groups felt implicated. Accusations of lack of vigilance, of sloppiness, of overreactions, are only to be expected in such a tense situation. Such accusations had been made frequently in the surveillance reports and investigations into the local cadres. This time the ground was fertile—a full-scale Stalinist purge took place in one of the studied townships. When it was through, not one of the responsible officials in the councils or the Communist Party remained in their posts. Moreover, in the thorough screening of all those inside these organisations, some other people with spoilt biographies were found out and removed from the system.

This happened in the second half of 1949, that is, almost a year before the well-known purge of the Estonian Communist Party. In the party purge, the indulgence of the Estonian Communist Party towards the kulaks in the anti-kulak campaign was a major point of debate and accusation. The Estonian party leadership was the only one to be purged among those in the newly acquired areas of the Soviet Union. Parallel processes of collectivisation took place simultaneously

in Latvia, Lithuania, and with a slight delay also in western Ukraine and Moldavia, and their course was precipitated in the same way. The party purge in Estonia, however, was unique. To be sure, this was not the end of the matter: the purge at the top was followed by new investigations on lower levels. In the summer of 1950, a new campaign, meant to “unmask” kulaks in kolkhozes and organisations, is clearly visible in the local sources.

6.1. Rapid Collectivisation

The propaganda for collectivisation in Soviet Estonia had been strong from May 1947 on, when a decision to promote collectivisation in the three Baltic republics had been made in the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.¹ The kolkhozes that were built tended to be small and consisted mostly of formerly landless people. They needed and received much help from the authorities. As the anti-kulak campaign was proceeding, kulak households could choose to give their farms to existing kolkhozes without any compensation, as this was one of the few ways of ridding themselves of the rising tax demands. The growth of kolkhozes before the deportation on 25 March 1949 was sluggish; not even members of the Communist Party or council officials joined them if they had the choice. The central authorities were aware and concerned, and tried to put pressure on party and council officials, issuing repeated exhortations and even obligations for those reluctant to join kolkhozes.²

Collectivisation did not take off properly until the deportations; the relationship between these two developments were even recognised in post-Stalinist Soviet Estonian dissertations.³ Table 6.1. shows the development of kolkhozes in Viljandi County according to offi-

¹ Kivimaa, “Eesti NSV Põllumajanduse kollektiviseerimine...,” 74.

² See footnote 29 below, also noticed in Taagepera, “Soviet Collectivization of Estonian Agriculture: the Taxation Phase,” 273, exhortations to party members to join the kolkhozes.

³ Kivimaa, “Eesti Kommunistliku Partei tegevus...,” 271, whereas a sentence making the connection in Laasi, “Eesti NSV talumajapidamiste kollektiviseerimise...,” 298 had been pasted over.

cial figures, and the last column shows the general trend in Estonia. The numbers might well be a little exaggerated, since the authorities regarded instant collectivisation as a victory, the tendency is however clear: the deportation dates, 25–26 March, were crucial.

Table 6.1. Development of kolkhozes in Viljandimaa 1949

Date	Numbe of kolkhozes	Numbe of households	Share of households	Share of households in all Estonia
1 Jan 1949	53	901	7	6
20 March 1949	80	1.328	11	8
1 July 1949	221	9.300	76	(68) ¹
1 October 1949	220	7.036	80	78

Source: Tõnurist, Collectivisation of agriculture in the Estonian SSR, 482, 521, 68, 84.

About one tenth of the farm households in Viljandi County belonged to kolkhozes on 20 March, whereas in the following months, two thirds of the farm households joined kolkhozes and by autumn the same year, the share reached 80 per cent. To begin with, many small kolkhozes were formed. As a relatively prosperous agricultural region, Viljandi County was somewhat ahead of all-republic figures, but the pace was the same throughout Soviet Estonia. The precipitous nature of the process can be further illustrated by weekly statistics on the republic level. The share of collectivised households increased from 8 to 28 per cent in the first ten days after the deportations, by another 20 per cent in the next four days, reaching 58 per cent on 15 April. By 1 May, the number of kolkhozes had increased 4.5 times. These statistics are understandably not very accurate, since such changes were too much for the shaky administrative apparatus to manage. The reality behind the figures is questionable and remains to be investigated. To begin with, many of the kolkhozes probably did not amount to more than a scrap of paper with signatures on it. But as the authorities started to get a grip over developments, socialisation of private goods and regulations were to follow. If the intention of the Politburo of the CPSU with regard to deportations had been to speed up collectivisation, the goal

⁴ The share of all households in Estonia refers to 25 May 1949.

was reached without doubt. The local population had no difficulties getting the message that the time for discussions and passive resistance was over.

An example from the Northern Township can illustrate this point. An inauguration meeting to create a new kolkhoz was held on 9 April, two weeks after the deportations. The local village council was behind the initiative, and the Executive Committee chairmen of Viljandi County and the Northern Township were present, as well as the local party secretary. Sixteen members of the kolkhoz to be established were present, five of whom were women, mostly wives of male members.

The first decision was to accept statutes for agricultural artels, the accepted form for kolkhozes.⁵ Next on the agenda were decisions about the minimum number of working days. Then a chairman for the kolkhoz was to be elected, and a chairman for the auditing committee, a steering group and a committee for the socialisation of the belongings of members. To become a member of the kolkhoz, the farmers had to transfer cattle and implements into the ownership of the kolkhoz. They were allowed to keep some items for their own families, what and how much became a constant issue of discussion. But in the end, this agenda was not followed. When the regulations had been read, a discussion about what families could keep for themselves erupted—apparently this was a more important issue for the participants than had been anticipated. They decided that they would be permitted to keep 0.5 hectares of garden space for each family, one milking cow and one heifer, a younger cow, a sow with pigs, sheep and up to 15 beehives. After that, they decided on a fee to enter the kolkhoz. The minimum working days per member was to be 10 days (per month, supposedly, but this is not expressly stated). Thus, quite a number of things still would belong to the private sphere. Most important is probably that more than half of the normal working time would remain disposable for kolkhoz members. Since many families chose to have only one family member in the kolkhoz, there was at least working power outside the labour provided to the kolkhoz enough for subsistence agriculture, which was the bottom line of this discussion.

⁵ Artel was the traditional Russian form for cooperatives, linking Soviet kolkhozes to historical experiences.

From there the participants of the meeting proceeded to elect people to the various positions in the kolkhoz leadership. Votes were always unanimous, and interestingly, the person proposing someone for a responsible post was always noted in the minutes. If the choice turned out to be bad, politically or economically, the members or the security forces would know whom to blame. The kolkhoz was named “Koidula” after an influential nineteenth-century Estonian poet of patriotic verse. The name seems to have been symbolic. The early kolkhozes normally had revolutionary names, and many of the later ones, formed after the deportations, took names alluding to Estonian folklore and national symbols.⁶

At the next meeting, ten new members were elected. The question whether family members were going to participate in kolkhoz work or not, was eagerly discussed. New members were sometimes required as an entrance condition to have their entire family participate in the work at the kolkhoz. During this second meeting, the area and boundaries allotted to the kolkhoz were decided. There were other people living in the area, families using farms that happened to lie inside what was now proclaimed to be kolkhoz lands, and they were simply to be removed. They received five days’ notice to leave their farms and houses, which they must have seen as a serious violation of their rights and conditions of survival.⁷ With the prevailing mood in the countryside, however, such violations were no longer given much attention; the priority rights of the kolkhoz were accepted. Other tasks recorded in the kolkhoz minutes during the following months were arranging various celebrations of Soviet holidays, and sending greetings to Stalin on his 70th birthday in December.⁸

The results in terms of production were catastrophic in Soviet Estonia, as in other areas.⁹ Before deportations, there had not been any particular grain crisis in Soviet Estonia, unlike the situation in the Soviet Union proper before collectivisation in 1929. Instead, the grain crisis resulted from collectivisation. During the last years of Stalin’s rule, consecutive campaigns were waged to unite and enlarge the col-

⁶ VilMA F.377, Op. 1, Vol. 43, 1–4.

⁷ VilMA F.377, Op. 1, Vol. 43, 5–6.

⁸ VilMA F.377, Op. 1, Vol. 43, 22.

⁹ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 466–70.



A group of people in Viljandi County at a meeting to form a kolkhoz in 1949.

Photo: EFA

lective farms through mergers. The kolkhoz Koidula was merged with other kolkhozes in the area in July 1950; if any negotiations leading to this outcome were held, they are not visible in the minutes. Instead of open discussions, a slogan uttered by Stalin was used as explanation for the need to expand the Koidula kolkhoz.¹⁰ The most apparent discursive changes taking place in this process are the ubiquitous references to the slogans and catchwords of the Stalin era, even if the naming of the kolkhoz could suggest resistance. Discourse thus changed quickly, though production did not recover for quite a long time.

¹⁰ VilMA F.377, Op. 1, Vol. 43, 44.

6.2. Division of the Spoils

On the village level, the local archives made a difference between regular and irregular persecution in this campaign of class struggle. Accusations of kulaks are registered in the archives, as well as the measures taken for the dispossession of kulaks and seizure of their farms, cattle, implements and household movables. On the other hand, the deportation acts were not recorded and traces of them have been removed from the local archives. These documents were instead kept in the special division of the central party archive in Tallinn, as the process was directed from the central level. Thus, the political, social and economic repression was discursively encouraged and took place in the public sphere of society. Personal violence such as forced removal, incarceration and beatings were not officially sanctioned, though encouraged in the same way, and they seem still to have been considered the monopoly of professionals.

The division of the assets that kulaks still disposed of, such as land, began as soon as the deportations were completed. The local people assigned to accompany the deportation squads were supposed to make inventories of the movables, as the deportation trucks were still on the way to the closest train station. A meeting at the Executive Committee in the Eastern Township the following week appointed two new committees, both charged with the division of kulak land and assets between kolkhozes.¹¹ On 6 April, their suggestions were discussed and accepted.

The haste was typical for Soviet administration and thus not exclusively used for kulak belongings, and can be compared to the very long processes of redistributions of assets, such as land reforms, which are the rule in capitalist countries. The seven kolkhozes in the township received eleven farms, each comprising more than ten hectares. The horse and machine depot received four rather large farms for its own use during one year. The local cooperative gained six farms on the same terms, which are considerable additions considering that cooperatives in this period were accused of being strongholds of dissent.

¹¹ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 66: 3. April 2, 1949.

Finally, the local machine cooperative received one farm.¹² Similar divisions of the spoils were executed in all the townships.¹³

The distinction between this “legal” appropriation and illegitimate appropriation was clear to the contemporary actors, as we can see in a case of fraud in the Southern Township. In a kulak household, some grain reserves had been hidden on the premises. Peeter P., deputy chairman of the township Executive Committee and party member, with his friend Aliide M. detected the deception in the summer. Instead of reporting it, they recruited two friends from the neighbourhood, and together they went on the night of 6 August to the household’s farm where they seized the grain—4,300 kilograms of rye and almost 800 kilograms of wheat. Peeter P. and Aliide M. cleaned the grain and then sold it at a local consumer cooperative store, receiving 4,543 roubles, a considerable sum, which they divided between themselves. For these acts they were accused of “destruction of state property” (*riigi vara riisumine*). The couple were sentenced to 15 years of work in a correction camp in the Gulag, and loss of political rights for two years. Two others who assisted them and who were also apprehended received twelve years in a labour camp and one year’s loss of political rights.¹⁴

6.3. Stepping Out of Line

An analytically important question is what happened when someone refused to participate in the dekulakisation campaign and stepped out of line. In the Eastern Township, a village deputy (*külavolinik*) asked to be liberated from his duties, because he was not able to fulfil them.¹⁵ As he made this request on 28 March 1949, three days after the deportations, this demand could probably be considered a reaction to the deportations. The village deputies had actively taken part in the listing of kulaks, and in the Eastern Township their participation had also been recorded in the minutes of meetings. This village deputy’s action

¹² VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 83: 4–5. April 6 1949.

¹³ See, for instance, VilMA F.136, Op. 1, Vol. 75: 23–24.

¹⁴ VilMA F.558, Op. 1, Vol. 206: 9–12.

¹⁵ VilMA F.507, Op. 1, Vol. 12: 14.

was not an openly declared political protest, but it is hard to believe that the meaning escaped anyone. It might not be a very clear example of a refusal to participate, but it is as close to one as the materials of this local study allow. How did the Executive Committee receive his declaration? Was he excluded from the kolkhoz, was he punished? On the contrary: his request to be relieved of his duties as a village deputy was refused and he was obliged to go on in the position!

The reaction of the Executive Committee was therefore to stick together, and to keep attention away from the unease that was probably broadly felt. The village deputy's superiors might have feared that others would have wanted to follow his example. It is difficult to draw far-reaching conclusions from this case, but it seems important for the purposes of analysis to determine whether instances like this one entailed punishment or not.¹⁶ This was obviously not the case here—this deputy was not punished or excluded from the local administration. Peer pressure seems to have worked, though, in keeping the administration together rather than purging some of its members, a result which might be interpreted as a certain lack of confidence on the part of the local authorities.

These examples of permitted and forbidden expropriations, of withdrawal and refusal to withdraw, also illustrate the normative chaos reigning in the Estonian countryside. Following Hannah Arendt, they can be read as instances of the dissolution of society, or more precisely as examples of societal trauma, following Piotr Sztompka's analysis.

6.4. Not on the Deportation List

The families on the kulak lists had to pay the exorbitant kulak taxes, they did not have the right to join kolkhozes and were systematically excluded from workplaces, organisations, schools and the univer-

¹⁶ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 56–59. Browning showed that the few who refused to participate in Nazi atrocities were not punished. This does not mean that having refused participation they were not frightened of possible consequences being brought to bear against them, though of course even in such instances the moral difference is great—slight reprisals cannot be compared to the lives of victims.

sity. To be a kulak was a severe social stigma that concerned all who were pointed out and confirmed on the lists sent to the central ministries. Still, more than half of those on the lists were not deported in the three townships I investigated. From these townships, 87 families were deported, and 98 more were on the kulak taxation lists.¹⁷ These however are uncertain figures; some of the families were found in other places than their home, so they could have been deported and their names could have appeared on other lists.¹⁸ They were unevenly distributed over the townships; in the Eastern Township only one third were actually deported, in the Southern Township, on the other hand, three out of four kulak families were deported. The township leadership was, as we have seen, not involved in this last decision; the internal security forces of the MGB made it on behalf of the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁹

Apparently, the MGB had received quotas for each geographical region of the Estonian SSR, quotas that never appear in the local decisions and probably were unknown to the local Executive Committees. The results of the township hunt for kulaks were quite uneven from township to township, which does not indicate that they had definite quotas to fill. But the deportation lists, at least in this area, were much more streamlined, in accordance with orders from above. Each township deportation list contained a share of kulak families corresponding to five per cent of all farm families. This statistical accuracy is astonishing and has a historical precedent. Moshe Lewin wrote an

¹⁷ These figures include kulak families still in the “kulak” register in 2003. A number of them were liberated at some point in the process, but afterwards their family file had again been moved, from the “liberated kulak families” register to the “kulak” register. It is of course possible that there were oversights or irregularities boosting the figure of kulak families not deported; this cannot be avoided in a situation where administration was far from adequate. Moreover, some might have been deported from other locations.

¹⁸ Some of these families are recorded by Enno Piir in his lists of repressed peoples. See Piir, *Sakalamaa ei unusta I–X*.

¹⁹ Rahi-Tamm and Kahar, “The deportation operation ‘Priboi’ in 1949,” 364–65. These authors emphasise the non-involvement of the local councils and deny the importance of German connections in the kulak families. However, the MGB selection was based on the local lists, which were composed by the councils and had a significant component comprised of accusations of co-operation with German occupation forces.

article published in 1985 about the debates concerning kulak quotas in the central administration of the USSR in the late 1920s. Lewin wrote that the agrarian sociologists in the Soviet Union had been discussing percentages of kulak households considerably lower than five per cent, based on local censuses and *zemstvo* statistics from before the First World War. The deliberation had been interrupted by Stalin, asserting that the percentage of deportees should be five per cent, and this ended discussion.²⁰ It is therefore chilling to note that the same percentage was used in an entirely different time and setting. While it might be a coincidence in this case, it evokes the impression of an abstract scheme, carried out without much consideration of the conditions on the ground—a procedure that was entirely bureaucratic and not based on an analysis of the society undergoing change.

What happened to the kulak families remaining in Estonia? Only some impressions remain in the archival documents, since these families did everything they could to escape the attention of the authorities and thus not to leave documentary traces. When these families were revealed, they had to leave kolkhozes and risked persecution. Still, only a few of them were later deported; most were able to stay.²¹

In the late 1940s, reports of the inhabitants on the assets of each family, the so called household books were kept on family farms; twice a year the number of inhabitants and their assets, animals, etc. were registered in them. The village deputies most likely had been charged with keeping of these books. When a family left their farm, the book-keeper was supposed to note what became of them. But in most cases, only a diagonal line, drawn over the page, marked the departure of a family. In the Eastern Township, where the administrative routines were slightly more developed than in the other two townships, some traces were left in the household books. In this township, 62 families on the kulak lists were not deported. Of these, there are no notes whatsoever in the household books for 21 families; the probable reason being that these families escaped to some other location before 1949. But for 41 families, notes were taken by the village deputies, who were

²⁰ Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System*, 121–141.

²¹ The figure of 288 individuals has been mentioned for the entire country, which probably consists of kulak families charged with sabotage in kolkhozes or industries. Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 455–56.

quite close to the events.²² Regarding these 41 families, the following is known:

- For only ten families, had the note “bookkeeping closed” been written in their records. They might have given their farm to a state organisation, or they may have simply left.
- Fourteen families had joined a kolkhoz. It is interesting that this is documented, since these families were expressly and repeatedly forbidden at the time to join a kolkhoz. They must have been living in fear of being reported and thrown out. Still, the casual way in which this was written must signify that locally, the kolkhoz leaders were not opposed to including people who were pointed out as kulaks. A quick check in a number of kolkhoz minutes in which the acceptance of the new members was recorded showed that they did not include any recorded discussions about admission of kulaks.
- Ten families were reported as having moved out. In two cases, it was noted that they had begun work in the oil shale works in north-eastern Estonia, an industry known to need labour power, to have poor working conditions, and to be willing to accept almost anyone.
- Two families had been arrested. Inability to pay kulak taxes was the grounds of arrest in one of the cases.
- Three families had been noted as “disappeared”.
- On one farm the keeper had died, and on another farm the keeper had been sent to a settlement or deported before the wave of March 1949.

The household books indicate that practically all kulak families had to leave their homes. Probably many went to live with relatives elsewhere, or tried to settle down in a town. Until the Stalin era was over, their existence was precarious; their kulak status could at any moment be turned against them. And should any of them cause trouble for their landlords or workplace, the kulak file was kept in the local archive and could be used against them.

²² VilMA F.124, Op. 1. All household books from two village soviets from the Eastern Township. The household books from the third village soviet disappeared in a fire.

The relatively large number of kulak families joining a kolkhoz was the most interesting discovery of the household books. It indicates that when first the Executive Committee of the Eastern Township, and later the leadership of the Estonian SSR, were accused of letting kulaks into kolkhozes, this was an accusation with some substance.²³ It does not seem likely that the bureaucrats and power holders had actually authorised inclusion of kulak families in kolkhozes. It is also highly improbable that the members of the small, local kolkhozes formed in the last years of the 1940s would not know the new members they accepted, and thus take in a kulak family by mistake, even if this is what they would of course admit to were they to be caught in the act. To accept kulak families into kolkhozes could be dangerous. Thus, the fact that kulak families were nevertheless being accepted into kolkhozes shows that people in kolkhozes were willing to risk a scandal to save a neighbour. Local solidarity and communal feelings were still alive to some extent.

Information about the fate of undeported kulaks can also be found in another and much later source material. The heirs produced it at the moment of reclaiming socialised goods and land in newly independent Estonia in the 1990s. These narratives about what had happened in connection with the dekulakisation process to the parents or grandparents of the claimants are a kind of oral history. Just as other narratives written fifty years later, they contain a number of family stories that might have changed considerably over time, with an obvious risk of heroic exaggerations. This source material was only available for the Southern Township during my fieldwork.

In this township, only thirteen families escaped deportation. Nothing is known about four of these; in one case a 71-year-old woman was not deported though she was considered a kulak, probably because of her age. Two families were not at home and never returned after the deportations. One of them later worked in a building team in a chemical factory under the shock or forced industrialisation programme typical for the Stalinist period. No less than four families had given over their farms to kolkhozes or the Executive Committee,

²³ See below, reports from the 8th plenum of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party (Bolshevik), KK - EK(b)P.

and they never were included in the deportation list. This was against the rules, as it was not considered sufficient for a kulak family to give away their belongings to escape kulak status, but in these cases it obviously worked to stave off deportation. Finally, two single women on the kulak lists managed to join kolkhozes, but they were thrown out of these in May 1950, when the central party purge resulted in a new wave of kulak persecution, this time inside the kolkhozes.²⁴

It is obvious from this material that in the period 1947–1949, as the dekulakisation campaign was going on, many kulak families chose to leave their homes, leaving all their worldly goods behind, a process that at the time was called self-dekulakisation. In the few cases in which we know where these families went, we know they joined the forced construction of the heavy industry. But there were also “irregularities” in relation to the prevailing commands, committed by the local administrations, by which kulaks were accepted into kolkhozes or released as they had left their assets to some public institution. In Estonia, the deported kulaks numbered about 9,000; another group of about the same size had gone through the same process of persecution and deprivation, but managed to stay in Estonia. They had to start their new lives from scratch, and spent the next four to six years in constant fear of being exposed. Their experiences at the hands of their fellow citizens were at least more varied in that they received some aid or refuge. They were received by relatives or friends in another location, they managed to get work even if the work was difficult and unhealthy; someone let them in without demanding that all their papers are in order. The anti-kulak campaign and the large wounds it created in the social system thus ran much deeper than the deportation numbers show. And this still leaves uncounted the scars left on both the perpetrators and participants in the repression.

²⁴ VilMA F. 890, Op. 9, Vols. 19, 21, 22, 67, 69, 101–102, 113, 123, 127, 131–132, 148–151, 165, 171, 197, 259, 275–276, 296, 300, 372, 412, 420–424, 434, 441, 450, 486, 519, 526, 530, 596–597. Only requests from the Southern Township were available.

6.5. A Normal Stalinist Purge

During the campaign against the kulaks in Viljandi County, the townships responded very differently to the call for class struggle. The Southern Township was several times criticised for not taking the campaign seriously and for taking a liberal stance towards the kulaks. Each time the leadership responded by finding several more households, but they did so at a markedly slower pace than the other townships. As described in Chapter 5, this township was led by a group of elderly workers who were members of the Communist Party. The party and the Executive Committee seem to have been in close contact and did not split as a result of the critique. Instead, they went on declaring in the minutes that they ought to intensify the struggle against the kulaks, without actually doing much about it.

The Eastern Township, on the other hand, was doing more than was asked of them, and their lists of kulaks presented in the first round far exceeded the expectations of their superiors. If the Southern Township was accused of a rightist deviation, the exaggerations of the Eastern Township belonged among the examples addressed by Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Nikolai Puusep in late 1947, as leftist deviations.²⁵ Critique against the work of the Executive Committee and its chairman Edvard Ö. was voiced directly, the problem being that only 56 out of 153 families presented as kulaks by the district could be shown to have the necessary characteristics.

Accusations of sloppy work were also directed at the local Communist Party representative. There was no party cell in the Eastern Township, and the Executive Committee chairman was not a party member, but there was a party instructor, or *partorg*. Comrade Olev B. was criticised at a meeting by the county Communist Party secretary Aleksander Jaanus for not having discussed the kulak campaign among farmhands, landless peasants and small peasants. This proletarian part of the peasantry had not been activists; they had not participated in the unmasking of kulaks. According to Jaanus, comrade Olev B. himself should have been controlling the activities of the

²⁵ Arold, "EK(b)P Keskkomitee...VIII," 1550.

Executive Committee and participated in the process of pointing out kulaks, and in particular he ought to have endeavoured to know the families under suspicion.²⁶

As a consequence, the party instructor was removed and was exchanged for a more energetic person, comrade Jaan R. This new *partorg* organised a “special activist” group in August 1948, which was paid to help with the forced deliveries of grain and to control the local council organisation.²⁷ A Communist Party organisation was formed in the district with eleven party members and two candidate members. This party cell quickly developed a sharp critique of the Executive Committee chairman Evald Ö.

At a meeting of the party cell in October 1948, the father of the Executive Committee chairman, Artur Ö., was under discussion. He had joined a new kolkhoz at an inaugural meeting, but then had withdrawn in the end. He was reported to have declared that it was not obligatory to join the kolkhoz, and that his son, the Executive Committee chairman, had told him that it was voluntary. As a result, other members had also abstained. One of the party members suggested that Artur Ö. should be added to the kulak list, since he had used non-family labour power, had belonged to the Estonian home guard *Kaitseliit*, and even participated in its repressive activities making arrests.²⁸ These wild accusations, however, did not impress the representative of the county Communist Party present at the meeting. He thought the local party cell should be working more in political education and that it should find good farmhands who could join the kolkhozes instead. Moreover, they ought to join kolkhozes themselves—all party members should have joined kolkhozes by 1 November! Finally, the man who had accused Artur Ö. was asked to investigate his case and present evidence by 1 December.²⁹

In this meeting, the conflict between the party cell and the Executive Committee in the Eastern Township surfaced. There must have been a great amount of resentment against the Executive Committee and its chairman because of the large number of families undergoing

²⁶ ERAF F.19, Op. 9, Vol. 16: 18. January 1948.

²⁷ ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 2: 1, 4.

²⁸ ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 2: 6–7.

²⁹ ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 2: 7.

persecution as kulaks in the district. But when the local Communist Party cell began its crusade against the Executive Committee chairman, it chose a different form of attack altogether. It seems as if the party cell very much wanted to be on the left of the Executive Committee, whose chairman was not a party member and did not belong to a kolkhoz. A quotation from the rhetoric of the local party secretary Jaan R., voicing the tasks of the party cell according to minutes, can serve as an illustration. He said it was the cell members' duty:

To develop an uncompromising attitude towards un-Soviet ideological deviations. To find out and reveal the bearers of such an ideology. To decisively fight against submitting to rotten western bourgeois culture and expressions of serf mentality, which are still spread among the most backward part of the intelligentsia.³⁰

The real fight, however, broke out after the deportations. On 18 May the Executive Committee made the decision to organise a meeting with all the local council delegates, with only two points on the agenda: a report by Evald Ö. about the work of the Executive Committee and an ominous "Organisational Question".

This meeting did not resemble anything that otherwise has been documented about the anti-kulak campaign in the local material. Participating were 15 elected (in the elections of 1948) delegates; the local Communist Party secretary, Jaan R., was there, of course, and also the county Executive Committee chairman Ermus, members of the propaganda committee and all kolkhoz chairmen. After the report of Evald Ö., containing a number of self-criticisms, there was a shower of questions. They started innocently, on issues such as the spring sowing plans and the aid given to the kolkhozes. Evald Ö. defended himself and said that the township did in fact do rather well, both regarding forced deliveries and fulfilment of the township's adminis-

³⁰ ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 7: 2. The Estonian wording is: *Mittenõukogudeliku ideoloogiliste moonutuste suhtes kasvatada leppimatust. Paljastada ja väljauurida sellise ideoloogia kandjad. Otsustavalt võidelda roiskunud mitmesuguse lääne kodanliku kultuuri ees, lõmmitamise ja orjameelsuse avalduste vastu, mis on veel levind haritlaste mahajäänuma osa seas.*

trative duties. A comparison of the documents reporting the work of three township committees bears out that Evald Ö. was correct, and that these accusations were not really the issue.

As Jaan R. took the floor, a personal attack was levelled against him. Evald Ö. had a 15 hectare farm, and his father also had a farm of approximately the same size. Did they not, someone at the meeting asked, in fact cultivate them jointly? This would mean that the joint farm exceeded the permitted size limit. Other forms of attack ensued. The activities of Evald Ö. during the German occupation were discussed. He was accused not only of having served in the German army, but also of having taken part in the German local administration and even of having received honours for his work in this role. Evald Ö. denied these allegations. The following question then concerned his activities while hiding in the woods during the German occupation. Didn't he expressly keep clear of the communist resistance? The next issue raised was his reluctance to cooperate with the local Communist Party. Another wave of attacks concentrated on a farmhand—a boy who watched over the herd—who lived and worked on Evald Ö.'s farm. The issue of Evald Ö.'s joint farming with his father reappeared.

Evald Ö. was dismissed as chairman of the Executive Committee of the Eastern Township. The conclusions recorded in the minutes read that although the township had been making progress, problems remained with the work of the township Executive Committee chairman, and the main reason for his dismissal was said to be the insufficiencies in the spring sowing campaign. The spring sowing had been a total failure in the entire country, the norms decided by the central administration had been too high and the areas sown did not correspond to them, so this was clearly an excuse for the moment. Evald Ö. was also criticised for having neglected the activists and having acted in a formalist manner—a formula used in this period for expressing dismay with a lack of political enthusiasm and revolutionary zeal.³¹ The local material was normally not very emotion-laden, in contrast to the official propaganda, for instance in the newspapers. The shower of accusations at this meeting thus seems to be the result

³¹ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 82: 10–12.

of people finally getting back at the man who had persecuted so many, and deported so many among them. At the same time, it seems obvious that the division of power between the local soviet structure and the Communist Party worked in a way to protect both if they kept a united front. Yet when there was conflict between them, the paradoxical result was that ambitious bureaucrats were attacked, while reluctant kulak-hunters escaped purge.

This was far from the end of the struggle, however. On 7 June, the “activists” had a meeting with 27 people attending where the accusations against Evald Ö. continued. One person attending is quoted as saying:

When I was living in the woods during the [German] occupation, Evald Ö. was hiding from us communists. He told the occupation forces about us Soviet people who were in the woods.³²

The same day, the Executive Committee decided that Evald Ö. and his father should be considered kulaks.³³ This was quite a poignant irony, that the villagers finally pointed out the man who had conducted a very ardent hunt for kulaks as being a kulak himself. The previous notable efficiency of the Executive Committee of the Eastern Township might have accounted for the ferociousness of the debate. Still, no one actually accused him of overdoing his part in the campaign. Fear was still too close at hand and attacks normally were formulated as if they were coming from the left, the camp loyal to the Soviet Union.

Once the purge had begun, it spread like fire in a dry forest. The pattern for the purge is recognisable from other accounts of purges in Stalin’s Soviet Union. Evald Ö. was removed from his office, and his deputy took charge. However, he was closely related to Evald Ö., and thus automatically under suspicion. During the summer, the next Executive Committee chairman was also dismissed, on the argument that he had been present as deputy chairman with Evald Ö. and thus also responsible for faults committed in the township. But it was not necessary to be closely related in responsible positions to be included

³² VilMA F.599; Op. 2, Vol. 689: 14–15.

³³ VilMA F.124, Op. 1, Vol. 83: 21.

in the examination. Everyone working for the Executive Committee was scrutinised in a mechanical fashion: committee members, directors of cultural houses and other holders of minor offices. In the summer, the purge reached the teachers in the township, and the Communist Party cell recommended that eight teachers should be removed.³⁴ Since the demands on loyalty were extraordinarily high and accusations of a lack of loyalty or of collaboration with the previous occupation were easily accepted without much demand for verification, the deeds of a given individual were not the point. The culprits were produced by the purge itself. Had a purge been let loose somewhere else, the investigators of the Communist Party would have found another group of people whose acts would have been scrutinized and found wanting.

By August, the purge of the Executive Committee and its employees was over, and it was now the turn of the party leadership in the Eastern Township. The accusation against them was that they had lacked the necessary revolutionary vigilance. This meant that all the members were put under evaluation and their membership had to be reconfirmed in the classical mode of the party purges in the Soviet Union. The purge went on from 27 August to 12 September, and in its course, 64 party members were scrutinized. Of them, 19 lost their party membership, and four more cases were suspended pending more information. This means that over a third of the cadre—36 per cent—were under suspicion.³⁵ The local Communist Party secretary lost his job just as his antagonist, the Executive Committee chairman, had lost his.³⁶

In the same process, Linda T., the victim who had turned into a participant, was also revealed, or “unmasked”, as an enemy of the people. She was removed from her post as chairman of a village soviet in the Eastern Township.³⁷

The anti-kulak campaign thus took its toll not only among the victims, but also among those who were participants on the side of the Soviet authorities. In the atmosphere of enmity that arose between

³⁴ ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 7: 36.

³⁵ ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 7: 45.

³⁶ ERAF F.811, Op. 1, Vol. 8: 30.

³⁷ VilMA F.318, Op. 2K, Vol. 5: 174–178.

the differing organs of the local community, one accusation followed another. There was enough looseness of definition in what was considered anti-Soviet so that whole groups could perish in the same stroke. The ferocity and ambitiousness of the Eastern Township's Executive Committee was probably an underlying cause that made people forward accusations to those on the right and the left, in political terms. Less than a year after the deportations, no one in the local leadership remained in their post.

Yet another feature of the purge of the Eastern Township must be mentioned. Several families that had been on the kulak lists since 1947 and had appealed, but had been turned down and were still kept on the kulak files, remained nevertheless members of the kolkhoz *Tasuja*. The adult sister and brother of Linda T., were living in the same kolkhoz, as well as the secretary of the village soviet where Linda T. had been working. Throughout the purges of the council system and the Communist Party in the township, the kolkhoz leadership did not seem to react. The kulak families were not thrown out of the kolkhoz until 15 May 1950, after the central purge and the accusations voiced in the purge about kulaks in the kolkhozes.³⁸ This means that the purge was focussed on the relationship between the Executive Committee and the Communist Party, and did not necessarily spread beyond their members or supporters.

Such purges did not occur to the same extent in the other townships I have studied. Certainly, hard feelings and accusations were voiced there too, but the same people remained in office. The kulak campaign had been less vicious in these places, and this was probably why the people there could live on with each other. Those in leadership positions in the Southern Township in particular held their positions for a long time to come.

This pattern of reaction to kulak deportations has been narrated in some detail; the events in the Estonian SSR developed after the pattern of the purges in the Soviet Union of the 1930s, in a snowball fashion. After the deportations on 25 March 1949, the same kind of insane persecution mania spread in the Estonian countryside.

³⁸ VilMA F.761, Op. 1, Vol. 18: 64.

6.6. The Purge of ECP in 1950

The purge of the Estonian Communist Party is, in contrast to the local purges, well known to most historians of the Soviet Union. While in all the newly acquired territories of the Soviet Union, communist coups, the annexation to the Soviet Union and adoption of Soviet laws, land reforms, and deportations were carried through more or less at the same time, only in the Soviet Estonian republic was a purge carried out in 1950.

The CPSU Central Committee had made an investigation and issued a critique of errors and shortcomings of the Estonian Communist Party in February 1950, and first party secretary Nikolai Karotamm had been summoned to Moscow. A statement from the Estonian Communist Party and Karotamm required by the central party officials in response to the critique sounds submissive and apologetic. In March 1950 these documents were discussed in a plenary session of the Estonian Communist Party Central Committee.³⁹ Later, the party leadership was dismissed, but not executed, and replaced by another group of communists of Estonian descent, in which there was a higher share of people having spent the interwar years in Soviet Russia.

Analyses of the causes and development of the crisis that have been published to this point seem if not conclusive then at least plausible. David Feest draws attention to the closeness of the ECP leadership to the Zhdanov group in Leningrad and regards the Estonian purge as an example of warning for the two other Baltic republics, equally close to that leadership. Arold and Isotamm, on the other hand, see the ECP leadership in fact as more nationally minded.⁴⁰ It is not my intention to determine which of these explanations is the more persuasive; they could easily be complementary. Instead, I focus here on the accusations that the Estonian leadership was too soft on kulaks and too formalistic in its approach. These were important issues held against them, even if there were many others. The main topic of the

³⁹ The debate, in Estonian translation, was published in the journal *Akadeemia*, in issues 1998:12 through 1999:8.

⁴⁰ Arold and Isotamm, "EK(b)P Keskkomitee... I," 2656–60; Feest, *Forced collectivisation in the Baltic states*, 436–439, are the most recent.

February 1950 meeting was the accusation that the leading members of the Estonian Communist Party protected bourgeois nationalism. Most of the public discussion in Estonia revolved around the performance of a few Estonian left-wing intellectuals—Nigol Andresen, Hans Kruus and Johannes Semper, who were accused personally in the CPSU Central Committee documents.⁴¹ The relationship between Estonians and Russians in Estonia was also a major issue; Estonians were accused of trying to keep the Russians in Estonia at a distance, and of not keeping them well enough informed.⁴² The nationalist deviation among Estonian communists was traced back to the national corps of the Red Army formed during the Second World War.⁴³ As we have seen in Chapter 5, many of the local officials in Estonia were demobilised soldiers from this same army corps.

The approach of the Estonian party leadership was called “formalism”. This formula was often used against the Estonian leadership in these documents. The accusation was levelled against Nikolai Karotamm, and also against the Council of Ministers and its president, Arnold Veimer. More specifically, these Estonian officials were accused of keeping representatives of the Communist Party away from the process of pointing out kulaks in the Estonian population. Karotamm had even accused Communist Party workers of wanting to collectivise by force. The activists as a category had not been allowed to participate properly in the process, “... in practice the party activists were kept apart from the operation of pointing out kulaks.”⁴⁴ Communist Party secretaries on the county level in Estonia raised this complaint against the Council of Ministers and the various Executive Committees in the discussion in Tallinn.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Arold and Isotamm, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee...I,” 2665.

⁴² Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... II,” 197–99; Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee...V,” 883, Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee...VII,” 1325.

⁴³ Arold and Isotamm, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... I,” 2681; Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee...V,” 894; Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... IX,” 1787–88.

⁴⁴ Arold and Isotamm, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... I,” 2684. The phrase was that of comrade Jaanus, the Communist Party secretary in Viljandi County: *Sisuliselt oli parteiaktiiv kulakute kindlakstegemise operatsioonist kõrvaldatud.*

⁴⁵ Arold and Isotamm, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... I,” 2681; Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... II,” 218–19; Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee...V,” 868–70,

As one delegate put it, right-wing deviation—Bukharinism—was their obvious fault.⁴⁶ Politburo member Nikolai Bukharin had defended agrarian society against forced collectivisation in the late 1920s, but had lost the debate, and later, his life, to Stalin. However, some of the speakers also spoke of excesses in the process of kulak persecution and left-wing deviations. The president of the Council of Ministers, Arnold Veimer, said in his self-critique that it was true that class struggles had been replaced by administration from above. But then again, the outcome of the kulak identification process had been very different in differing townships, just as we have seen in earlier chapters of this book. It was an error of the administration not to organise the implementation of the process in a better way.⁴⁷ The Estonian Communist Party top official responsible for agriculture, Comrade Aleksandr Sokolov, said directly that it was wrong of Karotamm to leave the kulak issue to the Council of Ministers to resolve.⁴⁸ In particular, the “kulak courts”, described in Chapter 4, had actually protected kulaks instead of waging a struggle against them.⁴⁹

Minister of the Interior and the chairman of the MVD in the Estonian SSR, Comrade Aleksander Resev, who was the main Estonian organiser of the deportation, finally complained that the security forces also had been kept outside the struggle against the kulaks. The fight against class enemies should not be the monopoly of MGB and MVD, he said, it should be the task of every communist. But nobody was helping the chekists! Instead, people tended to avoid them, and Karotamm had not wanted them to go after those who protected the traitors.⁵⁰

There were many complaints about kulaks making their way into the kolkhozes, a consequence of poor performance in kulak persecution. Moreover, kulaks were also going into industries and mines, thus

878–80. The defence of Veimer and the ECP responsible for agrarian questions, Sokolov, respectively.

⁴⁶ Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... VIII,” 1558.

⁴⁷ Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... V,” 868–70.

⁴⁸ Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... V,” 879.

⁴⁹ Arold and Isotamm, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... I,” 2684. A statement again made by comrade Jaanus from Viljandi County.

⁵⁰ Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... IX,” 1768.

fulfilling their intention of undermining society.⁵¹ Upon these statements followed a renewed campaign against kulaks in the countryside, which resulted in a number of people being thrown out of the kolkhozes in the spring and summer of 1950. The kulaks “unmasked” at this stage were not deported, but they had to endure the hardships of a spoilt biography, living at the mercy of whoever was prepared to take them in, and they were persistently watched over by the security forces.

Those participating in the Communist Party purge thus reviewed and criticised the whole anti-kulak campaign. I have emphasised the features described earlier in the local campaign in Viljandi County. It is clear from the transcript that much more time was devoted to particular cases of kulak persecution, and in this matter the leadership was thought to have been too permissive. Still, the criticism and self-criticism of Karotamm and Veimer, and not least the local Viljandi County Communist Party secretary Jaanus, called attention to the same main points. The complaints, however exaggerated, largely confirm the impression that the Communist Party and the security forces were involved in the process only in a marginal way. Then again, the accusations were far from logical; it is for instance difficult to understand why it would not be a real class struggle if ordinary people were involved. The answer is probably that the leading role of the Communist Party was not honoured in the Estonian process. According to the critics, the peasantry ought to have followed the Communist Party, not the Council bureaucrats.

6.7. Lessons of the Campaign

The March deportation in Estonia thus made it clear to the Estonian rural community, and to society at large, that the end of discussions about the future of agriculture had been reached. In particular, this meant the end of the particularity of Estonian agriculture. The arbitrariness of the social analysis underlying the anti-kulak campaign, and the “class struggle” emanating from that analysis was raised at times.

⁵¹ Arold and Isotamm, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... I,” 2667, 2674 (Karotamm’s speech); Arold, “EK(b)P Keskkomitee... V,” 868–70. Veimer’s speech.

The sanctity of private property was abolished at an early stage, as requisitions and expropriations went on throughout the process. The definition of class enemies still did not make sense, but the concept was gradually reinterpreted to designate those who were friends of the Germans, and simultaneously the enemies of the Soviet system. Still, it was a fact that the kolkhoz system had not been accepted, and that the rural population doggedly held on to their livelihood on the private farms. The deportations drove home the point that obedience was required and that the time of negotiations was past. The entire rural population of Estonia seems to have drawn this conclusion and learned the lesson. Inside kolkhozes, traces of negotiation could however still be found—how much was it necessary to collectivise, which part of the available labour power should be part of the kolkhoz?

The process also put local power relations into question. The Executive Committees in the townships could no longer count on the support of the council system at the central level, and thus lost some of their autonomy. The balance of the dual command system of councils and Communist Party was lost. This was the lesson of the purge in the Eastern Township, as the conflict between the Executive Committee and the Communist Party erupted after the deportation. The outcome of this explosion however is far from clear, since dual command persisted. The kolkhoz system produced another power basis for the local leadership in a few years time. Kolkhoz chairmen gained their strength from the economic achievement of the kolkhozes; they were in control of the material assets. They decided regarding contributions to schools, cultural centres, and local transportation and in that capacity they became the real leaders of the countryside. Still, the lesson was that it was not a good idea to engage in struggles with the local Communist Party leadership. Following the 1947–49 campaign, kolkhoz chairmen as a rule were members of the Communist Party, and thus the negotiations about the use of resources moved into the local party cells.

However, did this mean that the balance tipped in favour of ideology? The individual might have thought that it would be enough to comply with the demands of the central system to be safe from persecution. The boundary between perpetrators and victims was chronically unclear, but some individuals, fearing victimhood, held the illusion that they might be safe on the side of the perpetrators. This illusion disappeared in the purge of the Eastern Township. The lack of

clarity between victims and perpetrators had another, and more important significance. Anybody could be accused, and so everyone had reason to fear. Soviet rule seems to be different from the Nazi rule preceding it, in that most ethnic Estonians did not feel personally threatened by the Nazis. With the Communists under Stalin, no one could feel entirely safe.

Finally the anti-kulak campaign produced a group of outcasts inside society, the families that were designated as kulak but had not been deported. For them, the lesson of fear was most palpable. They led precarious lives in the new economy of shock industrialisation, or inside the kolkhozes. They had to live with a spoilt biography and at each turn they had to try to conceal their past—such as when looking for education for their children, a new job, or somewhere to live—not to speak of travel permits and vacations inside the Soviet Union. They could let their guard down a bit after the death of Stalin in 1953, but according to life stories, those with kulak status were stigmatized until the late 1980's. With time, individuals could devise strategies to avoid this stigma. Acceptance into the Komsomol was such a strategy, when possible. Certain difficult and onerous jobs and training for such jobs could be used—for instance going for training to schools in distant parts of the Soviet Union where not many questions were asked.⁵² In the enormous Soviet Union, the possibilities to get away seem more likely; in small Estonia, anonymity was an altogether more difficult problem.

The rulers of the Soviet system knew well how to make enemies and how to fight them ferociously. But they seemed unable to find ways of reconciliation, of devising measures of adaptation or simply ways for designated enemies somehow to scrape by. Instead, punished and still unpunished enemies became a dangerous and growing shadow society inside the Soviet Union. This perceived problem could even be solved by mass executions, as has been shown chillingly in recent research into the Great Terror of the 1930s. In Estonia, this did not happen; rather, it seems that the fate of the “enemies” of society remained an unsolved problem, never admitted and never dealt with.

⁵² Figes, *The Whisperers*, 344–356, 470–481.

The fact that kulaks were admitted into kolkhozes reveals the rift between the understanding of realities among the local population and that of decision makers both in Moscow and Tallinn. Resentment at the treatment of kulak families, and the remaining cohesion of village society were probably the main factors behind this silent resistance. The incomprehensible criteria for selecting kulaks could have been part of the explanation. There was also a straightforward need for their labour power. In Estonia after the war there was a lack of able-bodied men, and kulak families often had a thorough experience of farming, the skills of which were needed in the kolkhozes. One conclusion from the local campaign and its aftermath is that everyday resistance and support to kulak families were present in the process. In Estonian historiography, everyday resistance in the anti-kulak campaign has been too little studied. This silence stands in contrast to the heroic narrative of the armed resistance that was the forest brothers, an effort that was on the point of exhaustion in 1949.

Repression eased after the death of Stalin in March 1953, four years after the deportations. The Gulag camps were not abolished, though they were substantially diminished. For the kulak families in the Siberian settlements, change did not come until in 1956. Then it became possible to apply to return to Estonia, which many of those surviving did. Normally, they did not get permission to live in their former home township. Some of these returning kulaks told of a very cold welcome upon return to their native land, of suspicion and fear that was still directed towards them.⁵³ This hostile reaction might be easier to understand in the light of the involvement of large parts of society in their exclusion and expulsion. This involvement was often compulsory or unintended, but that, actually, did not help very much.

⁵³ Rahi-Tamm, "Küüditamised Eestis," 54–55.

Chapter 7

The Grammar of Terror

This local study tells the story of how the so-called kulaks were persecuted in a modestly prosperous agricultural community in Estonia after the war. The documents left by decision makers too often form the picture we get of a historical process. Where there is no freedom of expression this is practically the only accessible point of view. It is the responsibility of historians to look beyond such documents to understand what happened when decisions were implemented, affecting people's lives.

New aspects emerge as a consequence of the change of perspective. One of these is the openness of the anti-kulak campaign—it was different from the operations of the security forces, the “professionals of violence”. The hunt for kulaks was unexpectedly open, inviting the entire population to participate. Since the definition of a “kulak” was far from obvious, a considerable amount of responsibility was left to the local population, which they were understandably unwilling to take on. It is important to see that this responsibility was imposed from above and was not an expression of free will or of unleashed vicious instincts. Persecution was commanded and imposed, but it was up to the locals to decide who the victims would be. In this case, it is clear that not everybody actually participated. It is somewhat surprising that the local Executive Committees were keen to exclude Communist Party officials and security forces in particular, but on second thought this is understandable. The Executive Committees

were not only conveyor belts of the regime, they also had allegiances in the local community, and to involve the Communist Party and security forces would give more weight to ideological concerns. They also avoided the vague category of “activists”, which was void of meaning in a community where communism had been imposed at gunpoint. The openness of the process was important for the ideological notion of class struggle, although it was thoroughly uncomfortable for the local leadership. Our mental images of denunciations and the unexpected knock on the door in the middle of the night as the main tools of repression need to be revised. Forced participation was part of the specifics of Soviet repression.

Another important aspect of the dekulakisation process is how responsibility was assigned through decisions from above. We can see that responsibility was handed down from republic to county level. From there, the actual choice of victims was referred to townships, village soviets, the individual village deputy. On several of these levels signatures were asked for. How did local authorities handle the demands? Apparently, they preferred to use bureaucratic procedures, search the archives, browse statistics, and discuss appeals. We are reminded of the feared Soviet NKVD leader, Nikolai Yezhov, during the Great Terror in 1938, and his appeal to the security agents in Ukraine to learn how to use the archives.¹ The systematic character of persecution, it seems to me, has been underestimated in the existing literature. New research suggests that systematic procedures rather than whispers and ill will, were the regular basis of persecution. More empirical study is needed, from different periods and different places. For the Estonian case after the war, however, the overarching importance of the systematic nature of the oppression is clear. There were official and unofficial criteria for labelling one a kulak—the former were based on class characteristics according to Marxist theory, and the latter emerged from the definitions of who was an enemy in the Second World War, recently ended. The convergence of these was found in the use of Red Army prisoners of war as forced labour in agriculture, a specific category that existed in the post-war western part of

¹ Werth, *L'ivrogne et la marchande de fleurs*, 116, see also 158–166. This connection is even more obvious in Weiner and Rahi-Tamm, “Getting to know you,” 23–26.

the Soviet Union, without any correspondence in earlier campaigns. The systematic character of persecution throughout the Soviet Union was not specific in the same way, even if it seems probable that it was stronger in the parts of the USSR where the *zemstvo* system had been used with local autonomy for some time, producing statistics and economic indicators. Sociology and archival materials are more dangerous than we tend to believe.

A third important and neglected aspect is the impact of the Second World War and the double occupations of Estonia. The characteristics and definitions of who was enemy were specific for the situation after the war and double occupations, a situation that Estonia shared with large parts of East-Central Europe and western Russia—the area Timothy Snyder has called the bloodlands of Europe. The choice of victims was influenced by social characteristics in the sense that the owners of slightly larger farms were chosen. They were not a class apart, as they worked on their own farms and used little wage labour. Still, in the local communities the differences of farm sizes had been felt all the way through the period of independence, and in the post-war anti-kulak campaign these were used for the process with some precision. Among the owners of slightly larger farms, however, allegiance to the losers of the war, and the connection with Nazi occupation forces was decisive. This is not to say that the accusations of collaboration corresponded to the truth, but it was efficient, indeed decisive, to associate a presumptive victim with the German administration.

The relationship of Estonians to the German administration during the Second World War has only recently been seriously addressed. Young men were conscripted in the Nazi army, some volunteered, and others were forced.² But in the post-war dekulakisation campaign the circumstances were not considered relevant: those who had fought against the winners of the war—the Soviets—were more likely to be labelled a kulak. Another and more pressing question in this investigation has been whether the use of prisoners of war as labourers in agriculture was a sign of close relations to the German administration. In Viljandi County, in the late 1940's, this was the

² Kõresaar, *Soldiers of Memory*, 6.

assumption, and both victims and officials acted accordingly. It does not necessarily mean that the accusation held substance. Still, the interplay between occupiers, the position between the main contenders in the war, was decisive for the outcome of this process of persecution. War enemies, not class enemies, became the main targets.

7.1. Responsibility and Participation

Research on the Soviet experience of collectivisation has been centred on questions as to why collectivisation and dekulakisation occurred, and what it meant to victims. Typically, agency has been placed at the social top layer, while the rural population has often been regarded as passively enduring. Within the extensive literature on Soviet collectivisation in 1929–32, relatively little attention has been paid to consequences in the rural communities. Participation in the process has been noted in some works. R.W. Davies and James Hughes drew attention to the Ural-Siberian method in pointing out kulaks, which involved social pressure and utilisation of collective processes in a Russian rural context.³ Their research shows a process that involved the participation of the community, as against the previously held picture in which professionals and single perpetrators such as “whisperers” had the main part. Jan T. Gross in his work on the Soviet occupation in Poland also pointed out the emphasis on what he called the “democratization of violence”.⁴ More recently, Nicolas Werth, in his empirical work on the Great Terror of 1937–38 in the Soviet Union, has found more initiative from below than he had expected, such as in the fulfilment and over fulfilment of quotas.⁵

The literature on the Estonian deportations of kulaks has also to some extent addressed the question of participation, but mainly answered it in the negative, asserting a lack of participation by native Estonians. David Feest points to the recruitment of Estonians on all levels of authority, but maintains that mainly the local population

³ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 234–35; Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 121–31.

⁴ Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 114–19.

⁵ Gerlach and Werth, “State Violence—Violent Societies,” 172.

was used as denouncers.⁶ A recent article by Aigi Rahi-Tamm and Andres Kahar emphasizes that the security police under the Ministry of Interior—not local administrations, the Communist Party, or activists—did the final selection for deportation from the local kulak lists.⁷ Their text has been used to argue that there were only victims and no participants in the indigenous population. This is not only an oversimplification—it actually conceals the specific character of Soviet repression and its impact on the rural population.

Attention has understandably been focused on responsibility in a legal sense, on people making decisions rather than implementing them, and on the suffering of victims. With increasing insight into the mechanisms involved and the generality of participation, the introduction and inculcation of Soviet values into the everyday life of ordinary people have become clearer. The extent of participation is still a matter of debate, and my study at the local level adds materials to this debate, suggesting a quite high level of participation from parts of the local community at a moment when the central authorities were still struggling to compel local leaders to join the Communist Party and the kolkhozes. My point is that this participation was not spontaneous or guided by individual initiative, but was instead primarily bureaucratic in character. Screening of written documents and systematic use of neighbourly everyday knowledge were more significant than denunciations. The systematic character of the procedure used to identify kulaks—despite reluctance by those involved or, for that matter, their over-fulfilment of directives—seems to be the most important feature of early Soviet repression in Estonia.

7.2. Participation and Discourse

Interventions by the local population in favour of kulaks have been equally ignored in the literature on Soviet repression. They were embodied in the appeals and the submission of a large number of letters of support for unlucky kulak families, in which the local population—to

⁶ See Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 54–62 for the ethnic composition, and 398 among others for participation.

⁷ Rahi-Tamm and Kahar, “The deportation operation ‘Priboi’ in 1949,” 365.

an astonishing extent, the same people who were identifying kulaks—participated. The “democratisation” of the class struggle thus worked not only towards victimizing kulaks; it was also used to defend the accused.

The analysis presented in this study of the arguments used by kulaks and the various instances in which their status was examined reveals the framework defining what could and should be said and what was left out. Another noteworthy feature of the forced dialogue was the high pitch of the voice in which the political ideology and loyalty to the Soviet Union was declared. The common framework, not discussed but taken for granted by everyone, presupposed that all would be ideologically orthodox, absolutely loyal and willing to literally sacrifice themselves for the Soviet Union. The stage was set by the Second World War—the Great Patriotic War in Soviet parlance—the dead heroes (but not the soldiers still alive), the grossly overestimated number of Stakhanovite workers and other heroic and unrealistic symbols and slogans. When the kulaks wrote their appeals they therefore tried to convince those addressed that they were actually irreproachable fighters for the cause of the Soviet Union. They were sympathising with Soviet power, and if they were accused of anything, it was of being too eager to follow the calls of the Communist Party, and that their less ardent neighbours resented them for it. This argument touched upon another tacit understanding—that most Estonian rural inhabitants were far from loyal and sympathising, as opposed to the victims writing these appeals.

The high pitch of voice was dangerous since few really believed it to correspond to people’s feelings and anyone could be charged with failure to fall in line and match it themselves. The poorer and shabbier everyday life became, the more people had to make explanations or excuses through dramatic exaggerations. Russian prisoners of war who had not been heroic enough to die fighting could, according to these standards, be on the one hand elevated and insulted heroes (the latter due to their being used as labour power), and on the other hand, suspected of having betrayed their fatherland, for which they were sent to filtration camps upon being “liberated”. Similarly, poor peasants and landless workers were represented as winners of the peace, as the special favourites of Soviet rule, while they received insufficient holdings and insufficient means to cultivate them, and in fact failed to make a living and to meet their duties in delivering foodstuffs and paying taxes.

The tacit framework also presupposed that both parties fully accepted the decrees about taxation of the peasantry, and the argumentation was about the applicability of the criteria in individual cases. The issues that were really at stake—whether Soviet rule was accepted or not, and how much it took to prove loyalty—thus belonged to the framework that went without mentioning. The kulak families, and their neighbours, had to use this framework in the course of negotiations. Even if they did not believe in it, participation in the dialogue influenced their ways of expressing themselves. Soviet power, by involving the population at large in the process, gained a certain acceptance in the everyday discourse, which did not necessarily mean belief. This is important for the understanding of this procedure.

The individualisation of single cases in the process of appeals stood in contrast to the generalisation of real resistance, as practically every kulak appealed, once or twice, and they all received support from their neighbours and often even the local authorities. There were a huge number of people in the three townships who became engaged against the kulak campaign and said the only thing they thought possible to say: “Excuse us, but NN in particular does not correspond to the kulak criteria, the kulak declaration against her has been a deplorable mistake that ought to be corrected.” This was allowed, and the local soviets, the Communist Party and the security forces were aware of this. The resistance expressed in this particular way was widespread, as opposed to the occasional and arbitrary denunciations. The appeals also point to another aspect of the process, which is that it, in some sense, was deliberative. The “kulak courts” of Viljandi County were significant events in the process, demonstrated by the high level of participation from elite members with a responsibility for agriculture. The fact that the high level of the appeals court deteriorated over time suggests that it might have been criticised in Moscow. An alternative explanation for this degradation could be that it was caused by the ubiquitous haste. However, the local authorities believed in the importance of the appeals court, as is shown by the insistence of the county Executive Committee in demanding high level participation by the Council of Ministers.⁸ This procedure in fact was not unique to

⁸ See Chapter 3 page 18 (footnote 43).

the Estonian case. In the Soviet collectivisation campaign in 1930 a kind of appeal had been used in response to the call for slowing down the process issued by Stalin. It is not quite clear whether complaints of the alleged kulaks were discussed by local *troiki*, the specific Soviet body involving the Communist Party and the security forces, or by the Executive Committees, which entailed a legal procedure more civil and regular in nature, reminiscent more of normal legal procedure. What is clear, however, is that many families accused of being kulaks in the Soviet Union in 1930 used the possibility of appeal, and that this was a genuine means for reconsideration of their case as up to 10 per cent of these families were actually acquitted.⁹

Therefore participation was important, both in supporting and challenging the persecution of kulaks. Neighbours, activists, local officials, all participated in the selection process, both carrying it out and challenging its results. It seems that this process was a general one and did not divide the population into friends and enemies of the system, with a neat boundary between them. Individuals could be identified as friend or as enemy, but in terms of social categories, the boundaries between perpetrators, bystanders and victims in this process of terror were hopelessly blurred. A local study such as this one thus reveals an aspect left unconsidered in the past: the agency of local residents, both as participants and resisters.

7.3. Participation in a Bureaucratic Procedure

The composition of kulaks as a group has not been investigated systematically, although the arbitrariness of the selection process has been noticed in the literature.¹⁰ The Estonian scholarly literature on the subject has noted the preponderance of women, children and elderly people in the deportation.¹¹ Still, the question remains: did the kulak campaign actually strike against the village elite?

Kulak criteria ostensibly targeted exploitation of labour and income from capital. Since the use of wage labour was limited in

⁹ Merl, *Bauern unter Stalin*, 83–84.

¹⁰ Viola, *The unknown Gulag*, 27, for the Soviet case.

¹¹ Rahi, 1949. *aasta märtsiküüditamine*, 65–70.

Estonian agriculture, this criterion would not have yielded much result. Pointing out families who had used Red Army prisoners of war as labour power in agriculture became an innovative way of selecting “kulaks”. Besides using extra-family labour power, these families were suspected of having ties to the German occupation authorities, and on top of this, they had shown lack of respect for the victorious Red Army. This seemed to be a satisfactory way of solving the problem of finding kulaks in the countryside, one that entailed theoretical, political and even ethnic significance. If this had been the main ground for selection, single women and children, or elderly people would probably have constituted the overwhelming majority of kulak households.

Besides the official criteria, unofficial ones were interestingly pencilled into the printed forms of kulak declarations, probably in order to reach all concerned levels of decision-makers. These included accused individuals’ past political activities, and instances of disrespect (real or perceived) shown to Soviet authorities after the war. Another kind of note concerned collaboration with German occupiers other than the use of prisoners of war labour—for instance, participation in German-sponsored organisations such as the Home Guard (*Omakaitse*) or the social aid organisation. Condemned behaviour by family members was listed in this category, such as participation in Waffen-SS units, flight to the West during Soviet re-occupation, or other offences for which they had been repressed in the Soviet system. The theme of repeated repression has emerged lately in the literature on Soviet repressions, and the addition of families of “enemies of the people” to kulak lists is one case in point. When enemies had been identified, total destruction of their close relations tended to follow. These relatives were not necessarily part of the household; often they belonged to the nuclear family, but even more distant relatives were sometimes included.

Of the unofficial selection criteria, political activities in the past were indicators of the former village elite. But even more significantly, land ownership in the past was noted on the declarations, without it being an official criterion. Looking at the actual selection of kulak households, those owning farms over 50 hectares in the past formed a majority in all three townships. These unofficial criteria were not uniformly used, however. The Southern Township, reluctant to choose and submit kulak households for taxation, used the political criteria and large land ownership in the past most consistently, and thus

probably targeted the former rural elite. The selection of kulak families in this township also showed a larger proportion of able-bodied men than the other two townships. The very long kulak lists of the Eastern Township contained a higher proportion of small and middle-sized farm owners, and also a higher proportion of needy households without men. The outcome of the selection process thus seems to have been varied, the Southern Township displaying a kind of Marxist class consciousness, the Eastern revealing a greater dedication to bureaucratic procedure and a zeal for over-fulfilment. Finally, it is obvious that a large part of the selected kulak families were not village elites but, on the contrary, defined by reduced labour power in terms of gender and age. This was a direct consequence of the selection process and would make their survival in special settlements extremely difficult. The process thus targeted the village elite only to a limited extent.

In the post-Soviet years, a common belief in Estonia tended to be that denunciations were ubiquitous and resistance reduced to the small guerrilla-style movement known as the forest brothers. Those who have asked to see the files of their relatives declared to be kulaks have been puzzled when they did not find a suspect individual, an evil perpetrator giving away their family. Instead they have been faced with bureaucratic and stereotyped minutes and documents, bearing the same signatures as those of everyone else in the township. The face of evil thus seemed to be more bureaucratic than personal. The letters of support are moving, and they give a new picture of social relations in the countryside.

7.4. Participants—How Did They Get There?

Participation in the processes leading to class struggle and repressions was relatively widespread. Moreover, the system was built in a way to include universal participation. In this study, special attention has been paid to those who participated in composing kulak lists. I have not come across any such studies on a local level in the Soviet context, in stark contrast to the numerous works on Stalin and his closest entourage. The lack of new such studies is surprising given the fact that local participation was clearly more important and more widespread than historians have previously thought. Our understanding of the local

system has been lacking and needs improvement, even though it bore only partial, conditional responsibility for the repression. The concept of participant, chosen here, conveys an impression of deliberately designated choice, even—more accurately—forced bureaucratic participation, since responsibility was consciously handed down to lower levels as part of the system. Through a few participant biographies, or life stories, I have tried to show the diversity of trajectories and possible motives leading to participation.

In the existing historiography, totalitarian theories have emphasized ideological motives, and socioeconomic theories have emphasized contextual and circumstantial motives. This dichotomy is rapidly being outdated in the light of new research. The biographies of this local study do not support ideological explanations, as the only possible believer in communism among the three heads of Executive Committees was the least efficient persecutor of kulaks. There was some arbitrariness in the choice of local administrators inside the council system. In most cases, Soviet occupation meant a change of officials, but the new officials were not necessarily supporters of the Soviet system. Soviet rules demanded declarations of class credentials rather than skills for the tasks at hand. Still, recruitment was basically local; only the administrators on county level were brought in from the outside. Township Executive Committees were normally chosen by the county Executive Committee and screened by the party cadre department. There is no evidence they were forced to take such appointments; it seems they were more often forcibly removed than retired of their own will.¹² Meanwhile, loss of political credibility or politically unsuitable behaviour accounted for over one tenth of the grounds for removal. There is one discernible and rather common career, the appointment of former Red Army soldiers as township administrators. Interestingly, even this career seems to take local knowledge into account, so that the soldiers actually were appointed as leaders in their home villages. I have not been able to ascertain whether this was an initiative from the Communist Party or whether it followed from the ambitions of the national army detachments. This career was largely voluntary, as former soldiers could apply for the posts.

¹² Paavle, *Kohaliku halduse sovetiseerimine*, 183.

If general totalitarian theories do not seem to contribute much, the modernity theory of Zygmunt Bauman, emphasising bureaucratic hierarchies and obedience as features of modern administration, could be applied with more power to account for the case studies. Division of labour characteristic of the bureaucratic process alleviated personal responsibilities. Obedience, and not only obedience, but the will to please and to do more than asked for, seems to have characterized parts of the local process. The motives are not expressed in the sources, but fear and the wish to conceal a past that was not in line with the prevailing standards, seem possible motives. Social peer pressure did play a part, as many different institutions of the local government were involved in the process. Refusal to participate would not only be considered an individual judgment, but a judgment of everybody participating in the same process. This was, for instance, suggested by the refusal to let one single person expressing the wish to step back, do so.

Old quarrels and vindication have been suggested as explanation for participation by Jan T. Gross. This approach can be applied on different levels here. On one hand, it would mean personal grudges such as exist in most villages. This might be the case for the denunciations included in the kulak files. But in the lands of double occupations, there is another and much larger scope for this kind of mechanism. Wartime records for all included in the process played a major part, and will be discussed more closely below.

To what extent were the local officials part of the rural society, to what extent were they representatives of central Soviet power? Two extreme representations of this relationship could be evoked to clarify this dilemma. One is the Communist representation of the state, the party and the people as being literally one, with no boundaries between them. The other is the representation of oppositional forces, depicting Soviet power as isolated and well defined groups, living restricted lives in the village centres, not daring to walk outside without carrying guns. Where on the scale between these two extremes could the Estonian countryside in the late 1940s be situated?

Unsuitable political behaviour—from the point of view of Soviet power—was characteristic of village and township council representatives, and a sign of their position between central institutions like the Council of Ministers and the population. Their signing of appeals against kulak declarations is a concrete example, showing that they were

not clearly on the side of their superiors in matters concerning the villagers. Another example of the unclear boundaries between Soviet officials and ordinary people are the (few) activists and those delivering denunciations. The attempts of the Communist Party and the ministries to make local Executive Committee members join the Communist Party and the early kolkhozes bear witness to the struggle going on regarding their allegiances. The boundaries are notoriously difficult to draw, but the knowledge available today seems to suggest that the Soviet local officials, in this period at least, were not isolated in the rural community. On the other hand, they embodied both participation in, and resistance to the system in an uneasy mix, and this awkward position they tended to share with many other inhabitants of rural Estonia.

Normally there are inhibitions against violent behaviour in all societies. Even if open violence was not condoned, the forcible exclusion and expropriation of fellow villagers was close enough to constitute moral dilemmas. Why didn't the rural participants react more violently to the persecutions in which they were participating? To overcome these reactions, there were systemic factors exerting pressures on individuals. Hannah Arendt among others addressed the moral question, evoking the atomization resulting from the dissolution of society following the First World War. The Second World War and its double occupations can only have enhanced and strengthened the moral uncertainty of the populations of East-Central Europe as a whole, and not least the countries under Soviet rule. Piotr Sztompka has developed the concept of trauma for populations undergoing total and rapid changes of value systems after the demise of the Soviet Union, a concept that is applicable in the Estonian case. The symptoms of trauma were disorientation, a certain normative chaos, uncertainty as to what was right and wrong, proper and improper, good and bad. A lack of guidelines for behaviour and feelings of insecurity followed from trauma. The concept of trauma is thus widened from medical-psychological use to the social, and encompasses traumatising consequences of basic and rapid changes of a kind that could be perceived as favourable as well as negative.¹³ Genuine confusion regarding right and

¹³ Sztompka, *The Ambivalence of Social Change in Post-Communist Countries*, 27–29.

wrong could result from such changes. These theoretical explanations go some way to account for local participation, but subjective material revealing the inner world of participants would be needed to give a more convincing demonstration.

The materials that have been published regarding violence in the Soviet Union show how violence started among the leading cadres and spread downwards to those supporting them, just as in the Stalinist purge in the Eastern Township.¹⁴ The ubiquitous class struggle discourse of friends and enemies, in which every official had to participate, was very militarized in this period. The Soviet discourse influenced everyone, both its content and its intensity, or pitch of voice. Even people opposing this way of thinking had to discuss matters using the official terms, at least when they wrote to authorities, looked for a job and wrote the obligatory biographical accounts, wanted to educate their children, and so on. To what extent did earlier moral standards survive, to what extent was the Soviet discourse accepted? David Feest has suggested that remnants of nationalist thinking from the inter-war period accounted for the legalistic approach of the Estonian leadership, which has been shown in the procedure of listing kulak families.¹⁵ It seems plausible that such remnants of earlier moral and juridical standards would be strong in the newly occupied areas of the Soviet West. Still, the materials Nicolas Werth has been using for his study of the Great Terror of 1936–37, and the study of the first collectivization campaign by Stefan Merl, suggest a legalistic approach in situations far from the interwar republic of Estonia. The legalistic approach thus seems to be inherent also in the original Soviet society, and gives some support to the hypothesis that it was in fact striving to build an alternative society with a legality of its own, and that the violence of class struggle was a standard and codified procedure in this alternative legality.

My original question was less far-reaching. I wanted to know how it was possible, in a society where there were no exploiting large land-owners, practically no communists and where power was still insecure, to go through with a campaign against farmers with whom the majority sympathised. It has been possible to show how the so-called kulaks

¹⁴ Chapter 6 above, page 202.

¹⁵ Feest, *Zwangskollektivierung im Baltikum*, 479–81.

were identified, even if it is obvious that the definitions were unclear and even distorted. This was a question that had an answer: it was done by local people. But from this answer followed a new problem: how were they made to participate? Looking for a moment at research on the Holocaust, such questions have led to discussions about whether ordinary people actually knew what was going on, how well integrated Jews were in the societies, and whether there was previous anti-Semitism in the society. If a comparison is made with the Soviet case, undoubtedly people knew about repression, that the excluded kulaks were well integrated in society and very respected. Class hatred does not seem to be an important issue in the interwar years; on the contrary, strong anti-communism was characteristic of that society.

Those who lived through this era and have testified about it, as well as those who write about it agree that people participated in the processes of repression out of fear. What were they afraid of, and how did they perceive the threat? There was certainly a threat from the security forces, a violence well known from other authoritarian states and dictatorships as well. But this case was different and specific for the Soviet Union, and dependent on the class struggle and its crucial position in communist societies. The campaigns against class enemies were public and carried out on a large scale. The absence of exploiting large landowners as distinct targets was significant as it meant there could be no sharp boundaries between victims and perpetrators. On the contrary, the formula "you will find the enemy where you least expect him" was to be heard many times. Most of the violent campaigns started from the top of the hierarchy, often inside the Communist Party. Significant for this particular campaign was also that the important class markers, in the form of land ownership and other means of production, were removed already in the first phase, through the Soviet land reform. What was left was a quagmire of discussions about the "real" interests of people, who was related to whom, who had done what in the years before Soviet rule was reintroduced; in other words, the campaign was about attitudes, dependencies, and history.

Another significant feature of these campaigns is the interplay between hostile and ambiguous statements from the leadership, and much too willing participants on the lower levels; similar tendencies are noted in other kinds of societies as well. Particular in the case of

communism was the demand for everyone to participate and be active, a phenomenon which Jan T. Gross referred to as distributing the state monopoly of violence to the people. Those assigned the implementation of the anti-kulak campaign had not volunteered for the task, nor even joined the Communist Party; without any preparation, or even prior notice, they were charged with the task of repression. This could be compared to another instance of state-sponsored repression, the Chinese cultural Revolution—in which the Red Guards were charged with similar tasks. In practice, those who did not accept the task of repression could be accused of being counter-revolutionaries.

An important question arises: what happened when individuals refused to participate? In Soviet Estonia many examples can be found of people not doing what was expected of them, of absenteeism, heavy drinking in documents about disciplinary measures. There were also strategies of avoidance, such as have been described in the Southern Township. But there were no outright refusals among the disciplinary cases in the studied material.

The system gave a special position to the “activists”, a loosely organized and voluntary force. Practically, this meant that anyone could barge into meetings where the fate of kulaks were discussed, and demand to be heard. Party and security forces could take part in decisions formally delegated to the councils and Executive Committees. In the particular cases studied here, this apparently did not happen. If the Executive Committees were inefficient in the anti-kulak campaign, this was blamed on the absence of activists in their work and decisions. “The voice of the people” thus went missing and politics was not corrected through confrontation with realities. As party membership (or the lack of it) of individuals present at meetings was stated in the minutes, we can see that the local Communist Party representatives were not invited to participate regularly. They were very critical of the Executive Committees for leaving them out of the process. In cases where they did participate, mostly in the Southern Township, their role seems to have been to avoid pressures and campaign excesses rather than to push for active and immediate steps toward dekulakisation. Still, the demand for activist participation was raised during the campaign, and some new people turned up in the minutes. Some of them were, judging by their names, family members of those on committees, and others were merely noted as poor peasants. However, their attendance did not change the

work of the Executive Committees in any perceptible way. If ardent activists had really demanded to be included and to be able to inform on kulak families in the villages or townships, it would have been difficult to deny them. Complaints by party representatives and the county-level MGB chief, voiced during the purge of 1950, suggest that Executive Committees did keep activists out, sharpening the conflict.

The attitude that everyone ought to participate in the anti-kulak campaign also concerned those who wanted to remain bystanders. Because of the flexible boundaries between victims and non-victims, no one could be sure of their own position. Any moment, they might be confronted with a situation where they were accused of being class enemies, or were supposed to give someone away or take a stance against someone accused of being a class enemy. This was at the core of the fear felt by individuals—rather than having received the right to become some kind of perpetrator, they were saddled with the demand for their participation.

The specific form of social organisation in the Soviet Union worked to sharpen the fear, and this was at work in the Estonian anti-kulak campaign. It was one aspect, among many others, discussed by historian Stephen Kotkin in his 1995 book *Magnetic Mountain*, concerning the role of the Communist Party within the Soviet system. Since the publication of this book, little has been said about this role. Rhetorically, the Communist Party was the leading actor in society, it made the decisions, and this was probably true at the top level in the centre, in Moscow. Local party units faced a more complicated position, taking orders from above and simultaneously expected to “lead” administrators, kolkhozes, enterprises and communities. Power struggles would be the natural outcome, since council members would have their own superiors to report to. Conflicts between the executive power and the party leadership seem to be the rule rather than the exception; one important reason for this was that the Communist Party did not have material resources in their own hands. Kotkin saw this because he traced the building of an industrial complex, which became a power basis in itself. Leaders of industrial complexes, kolkhozes and sovkhoses controlled the material resources in practice and reported to planning commissions and the ministries. Those who lead large production units were very powerful, controlling not only the means of production but also social security in terms of housing, institutions

for the elderly, day care centres, and vacation resorts. In addition, they were in charge of large parts of infrastructure such as roads and transportation and even distribution of consumer goods outside the public shops. Their responsibilities were much broader than of those in similar roles in capitalist societies. Beside them, on every single level, were a party organisation and its leadership. The Communist Party representatives ran the risk of feeling inferior, lacking first-hand access to material assets, and thus the ability to distribute the more general rewards and incentives to the broad population. Their way of asserting themselves was through political drives and campaigns, purges and threats. And these campaigns are the location of the violence.

In the Estonian countryside, these structures were still not cemented. Still, the economic resources were at the disposal of the Executive Committees before collectivisation became widespread and institutionalised. The rivalry between local party representatives and the Executive Committees is well known and existed practically everywhere; in the cases examined in the present study, the rivalry could have had lethal consequences. In the Southern Township, where the party cell and Executive Committee members came from the same group of interwar sawmill workers, peace between the two groups allowed them to drag their feet in the anti-kulak campaign. In contrast, there was open enmity between party and Executive Committee in the Northern and Eastern townships. Negligence by any of these Executive Committees in pointing out kulaks obviously would have meant risking being reported by local party leaders. The double structures of society should be considered as a driving force for societal violence.

7.5. Openness and Legitimacy

Class struggles in the countryside not only involved the population at large, it also bore witness of an attempt to build an alternative system of justice. There was quite generous leeway for interpretation of rules. These were not always enforced, and the violence inflicted in the name of class justice was ineptly albeit energetically documented, with the resulting records saved in archives. At first, the very detailed level of documentation of the persecution of kulaks seems astonishing. Everything was recorded in the local archives except matters related to

events the week before the deportation and the deportation itself on 25–28 March 1949. When decisions were not recorded, it is probable that those making them were afraid of the reactions of their contemporaries or of later readers. The selective secrecy of the period, classifying documents and abstaining from recording events in minutes, supports the hypothesis that the deportations of kulaks was contrary to the then-current conception of justice. The main impression left, however, is that the ample documentation legitimized the procedure.

Let us consider the example of expropriations and seizures connected to the Soviet land reform of 1944 to 1945 and later kulak taxes in 1947 to 1949. The earliest cases of these are recorded on hand-written forms, later on stencilled or printed forms in a few differing versions with rather minor changes. In each case the number of the decree according to which the seizure was carried out is referred to. Several people belonging to the local land committee were usually present at the time when goods or property were seized. The responsible official as well as other participants signed their names to the document. Names of neighbours and family members present on the expropriated farm were also taken down as witnesses. The owner of expropriated goods gave his signature. Moreover, there is a column in the form accounting for the disposal of the goods.

The entire process is framed as a normal judicial procedure, with ceremonies reminiscent of the rule of law. The possibility to appeal against being identified as a kulak was an available option. The expropriations could be framed as a matter of taxation, and in addition, the consent of a People's court was necessary prior to seizures because of tax arrears. The judicial formalities of these proceedings were directed at those who were expropriated, to show that they were subjected to expropriations or seizures because they had broken the law, and that they were judged according to the rules. But it is easy to imagine that these formal gestures also served the interests of the participants among the local authorities—they constituted an appearance of normality to support them in a situation when they probably doubted the rightness of their own work. The documents were kept in the offices of the local archives, and most of them were classified with the inscription "KP" meaning limited access.¹⁶

¹⁶ KP in Estonian meant *Kasutamise piiratud*—Usage Limited.

The only ones having access to these documents were the upper strata of the civil servants—those who belonged to the local *nomenklatura*.

Documents concerning deportation and arrest were treated in a different way. It seems possible to clearly distinguish between the kinds of documents that were drawn up in kulak declarations. The file stating that a family was declared kulak and should be taxed accordingly was kept by the local government. The documents showing which of these families had been deported were kept in the special division of the party archives. The documents detailing the economic persecution of the kulaks were legitimate in the sense of being treated according to the normal procedure, the documents pertaining to forcible removal were kept strictly secret, which suggests a lack of legitimacy. In the latter case, the Soviet regime still demanded documentary evidence, even if it seemed aware of the fact that the population at large would not accept its actions as legitimate. The documents were not left at the local level, risking circulation among a relatively large number of civil servants whose reliability could be questioned; instead, they were kept in a well-guarded archive controlled by more reliable staff.

Similarly, the selection of kulaks was normally visible in the minutes of the local government. The handing over of the process to the local council system in itself would suggest the selection was regarded as a normal socio-economic task. The process was public, the selected had the right to appeal, and the arguments used by the local government and the appeals courts were stated in writing. The minutes on the county level normally included the names of those in attendance and the arguments presented. There were two previous levels—the village and the township—the path of files through these levels can be followed in the minutes of the county Executive Committee and through the lists presented to it, but not necessarily in the minutes of the village soviets and the Executive Committees in the townships, where the first proposals actually were made. In some villages and townships these decisions were recorded, in others not. This could be interpreted as different levels of order and bureaucratic skill, but it could also mean that some people in charge were more aware of the dubious character of such decisions and the moral dilemmas they caused, while others were keen to emphasise the normality of such decisions. The deportations and the preparations for them, in contrast, are not mentioned in any of the local minutes. Out of the blue, later in

the spring of 1949, a number of issues were raised in connection with the property that deported kulaks left behind, which was then taken care of and handed over to collective farms.

The conclusion is that expropriation of property was considered “normal” business, and that the intention to heavily tax kulaks as a group of scapegoats was considered in the same way. Procedures designed to resemble the legal procedures of earlier periods, including public knowledge and even some transparency, made expropriation and taxation seem legitimate. However, this was not a generally accepted idea, and on the lowest level of administration, in villages and townships, such decisions sometimes were kept secret. On this low level, it can be easily imagined that if the names of those participating in a decision were made public, it would affect the relations of these people, living side by side with the relatives of the victims. Physical violence against victims—such as deportations or arrests—on the other hand, seems to be on the other side of the imagined boundary of what could be legitimised and openly discussed in the local community.

7.6. The Importance of War

Stalinist repression in the newly occupied territories of the Soviet Union, such as Estonia, was closely related to the war with Nazi Germany. In June 1941 there had been a wave of deportations of the political, economic and governmental elite, one week before the outbreak of war in Operation Barbarossa. Later, in the process of reoccupation of Estonia in the autumn of 1944, people considered to be collaborators with the previous occupation regime were purged, a process that had parallels in the West, although the understanding of law and justice was different in the USSR. The anti-kulak campaign, in contrast, seemed to be a blue-print copy of the Soviet campaign of 1929 to 1932, and, taking place several years after the end of war, looked like a more typically Soviet wave of repression. But a quick look at the files and minutes in the source material proves otherwise. The war and the three years of Nazi occupation, that is, the wartime record of the individual actors, are ever present in the documents. Does this mean that the anti-kulak campaign was just another phase of the revenges and retaliations haunting the area between Germany and Russia? That would obviously be going too far—

it was not the only way to understand the repression. It was a campaign where class struggle was waged and its specific bureaucratic Soviet form was just as important for understanding what was happening. Still, the spiral of hatred and revenge due to double occupations added to the sharpness of the campaign in newly occupied Estonia. Moreover, it is an aspect that is missing both in Estonian historiography about this particular campaign, and in the work of non-Estonian scholars such as, for instance, that of German historian David Feest. Could this omission of the struggle between Nazism and Communism be due to a hesitation to take on discussions about collaboration and guilt in works about people treated with violence, being the victims of unsolicited repression? The importance of war and double occupations is a necessary part of the picture if we are trying to understand the past, not necessarily to deliver moral judgments. It is part of a geopolitical reality of the space of North-Eastern Europe, a reality that has made its imprint on history for hundreds of years. The war looms large in this relationship, the question of what every single person did during the war was one of the major issues. How can, in retrospect, the war experience be incorporated in the narrative of Soviet terror?¹⁷

The procedure of the anti-kulak campaign was inspired by the previous campaign in Russia, and the war and occupation history did not enter into the formal part of the process. Still, this experience was part of the sensibility of all the actors. The whole of society seemed aware of the tension produced by the fact that Estonians had been living in German-occupied territory during the war. They had been occupied; they were no allies to the Nazis, but the tension revolved around the suspicion that many Estonians had preferred German to Soviet occupation, that some had welcomed Germans as liberators, that a number of them had often collaborated, and that the nationalist forces had encouraged resistance and even enrolment in the *Waffen-SS* in the final struggle with the Red Army in the summer and autumn of 1944 in order to avoid Soviet reoccupation of Estonian territory.

This had obvious and serious consequences for suspected kulak families. Their wartime behaviour and contacts with Germans were

¹⁷ Timothy Snyder's book *Bloodlands*, while focusing on the Jewish population, promises to end this silence.

part of the informal notes in their files. For others, who were not at the moment under suspicion, their wartime record still existed as potential threat to their security. When people were “exposed” after the 1949 deportations, the same accusations were still used. For those who participated actively in the repressions, the wartime record was just as essential. Several of the participants followed here in this study were working with the Soviet regime, ostensibly to cover up a previous close relationship to the German occupying force. Others, mostly men, could be considered untrustworthy in Soviet Estonia just because they had remained on Estonian soil and had not joined the Red Army. Even those who had supported the first Soviet occupation in 1940–41 were not fully accepted, because they had lived on occupied territory.

In this way the spiral of revenge and retaliation meant a sharpening of class based violence in the new territories of the Soviet Union, as well as in old territories that had experienced German occupation. Besides influencing the amount and level of violence, the war experience also shaped the process in a particular way. The share of single women and elderly households among the kulaks can partly be understood from the perspective of revenge: these were wives, parents or parents-in-laws to enemies who had already been punished, as collaborators or as recruits in the German army. Direct revenge was followed by repression of a more indirect kind, and guilt by association was systematically applied. This was not new: in-depth studies of the Great Terror of the 1930s have recorded how the accusation of one “enemy” could initiate a chain reaction drawing in all associates and followers of that person.¹⁸ The anti-kulak campaign in Viljandi County followed the same logic.

As the process developed, the circles that the local administration investigated with a view to kulak declarations, widened. In the first rounds the accusations were mainly based on events or facts pertaining to the families under scrutiny. However, from autumn 1948 and onwards, accusations often referred to absent family members and distant relatives. This can be understood as a learning process in the Soviet way of thinking. The responses from accused kulaks, however, did not follow up this line of development at all; the compromising contacts were regularly not commented on. Class arguments and

¹⁸ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 344.

direct relations to the Nazis were part of a common framework of discourse used by both victims and perpetrators; the references to absent or distant relatives constituted a hidden agenda, used by Soviet officials only. On the part of the accused, this can be interpreted in part as attempts to conceal such relatives, the kulaks in documents they submitted discussed only their own affairs and whether these were compatible with kulak criteria, omitting any argumentation about the doings of other people. The understanding of justice held by the accused and Executive Committee officials differs on this point, and the regime view does not seem to have penetrated among the victims.

Perhaps the most intriguing grounds on which individuals were singled out as kulaks was that they supposedly did not adhere to Soviet laws while Estonia was under German occupation. This reason for dekulakisation seems difficult to understand; people who otherwise could easily have been categorised as bystanders were accused on the basis of this argument. The violent and unstable Soviet reversal in 1940–41 was used as a standard for judging behaviour during the war—as if anybody would have known it would prevail. The interwar republic itself had not been a very stable and reliable structure; in the economic crisis of 1929–1932, its leaders had delivered serious criticism against liberal political values. The role of the state had been strong, but the values of the interwar state were mostly of a nationalist kind. In 1940, these values were exchanged for the Soviet values of idealising workers rather than the educated elite, and a proletarian culture replaced a petty-bourgeois one. The change from the Estonian republic to ESSR thus was not from security to insecurity or the other way around, the change rather meant that people were confronted with two opposing sets of guidelines to behaviour and punished because of a choice that was considered wrong not by the contemporary society but by a later set of rulers.

7.7. A Grammar of Terror?

Terror is not uncivilised, maintains anthropologist Michael Taussig.¹⁹ On the contrary, it is a consequence of a certain form of civilisation.

¹⁹ Taussig, “Culture of terror—space of death.”

Anthropologist Vieda Skultans goes one step further, asserting that the responses to terror follow a cultural grammar.²⁰ Grammar should in this context be understood as a system of logic, not unconditional or without exception, but still one that follows a set of knowable rules. This perspective on terror and on responses to terror has inspired me to search for a structural logic and for meaning, both in the terror wielded against the kulaks and in their responses to the terror. Others have maintained that terror hits blindly, as part of a strategy to spread fear.

Discussions about the logic and aims of terror are more extensive in their applications than implied in the subject discussed here in this study. The character of punishments and differing forms of degradation carry messages that people will react to. Their own narratives also constitute attempts to link their personal experiences with the public sphere. My ambition in this investigation has been more limited. I have analysed the significance to society of the choice of victims in the persecution of kulaks. The analysis has included the grammar of negotiation about kulak criteria between the authorities at two levels—the local and the republic, and the kulaks themselves. Finally, I have tried to understand how people participating in the persecution of kulaks ended up in that position. No study has been made of concrete choices of victims at the local level in any case of mass repression by the state. In the example of Estonia, the problem of choice of victims cannot be escaped since there existed no obvious upper class in the countryside, corresponding to the ideological representation of the kulaks. The official answer was that the class enemy was chosen, and this explanation should perhaps not simply be discarded without further examination. Did the participants in fact select the wealthiest group of the peasantry, which also was the leading group in the inter-war period? Did they use, in the campaign, existing economic differentiation in rural society? The answer was, yes, to some extent. Terror had its own logic in terms of class, systematically striking against those Estonian peasants who had larger than average farms. In this sense it can be directly linked to ideology. When kulak families were singled out, the procedures for doing so relied on a previously existing social contradiction—an economic differentiation of the peasantry that had been perceptible as a

²⁰ Skultans, *The Testimony of Lives*, 22.

matter of degree in the interwar period. There was also the rationale to punish exploitation, or, in Marxist terms, appropriation of surplus value. Exploitation in this sense was not part of the egalitarian owner-occupier rural society of Estonia. Instead, exploitation turned out to be a formalistic argument, used in a way that was unrelated to actual economic profit. Still, it is clear that it became dangerous to have used wage labour in Viljandi County during the war; it was liable to result in accusations, leading to deportation. Was there another and more immediate concern influenced by calculations of economic benefits affecting the decision over who was and who was not a kulak? Those who selected the kulaks ended up with households contributing only weakly to general production—the age and sex distribution suggested such targeting of weak households. But the variation among townships made clear that the township choosing a large number of weak households also had unnecessarily long kulak lists. The driving force for choosing them thus seems to have been something other than concern about production.

Motives of revenge, as consequences of war and the consecutive changes of rulers, seem close at hand in the recent history of the Baltic states. When the communist coup d'état occurred in June 1940, thus introducing Soviet law, some people actively supported the new regime. The Soviet land reform was carried out in all the rural areas and pitted losers against winners. Those who were sympathetic to Soviet rule and remained in Estonia during the German occupation were thoroughly punished by the Nazis and their local supporters. However, most Soviet sympathisers withdrew to the Soviet Union before the German conquest and returned in 1944; then it was their turn to punish the collaborators of the Germans. Three times within a span of ten years the political situation changed radically—losers were violently punished and injustices inflicted by the new winners. This spiral of repression was a strong motivating force behind the various kinds of repression.

The participants that I have followed in this study did not disclose their actual motives. Their biographies, however, show examples of trajectories that seem to follow certain general trends. The “tender wolf,” the chairman of the Northern Township, sympathising with as well as accusing kulak families, was part of the social mobility process in Stalinist society, described, for instance, by Sheila Fitzpatrick.

Typically, this kind of individual happened to be of the age to be mobilised into the Red Army, and was offered a position as reward. From his late adherence to the Communist Party it seems clear that ideological motives were less prominent than were material rewards. The “reluctant henchman”, the chairman of the Southern Township, used his class credentials, but also his relations to the Communist Party to keep the numbers of kulaks in his township low. The “eager bureaucrat” in the Eastern Township did not ostensibly have other motives than pleasing his superiors and warding off attacks from the Communist Party. Whether that was enough, or whether he also had something to hide, remains an open question. Other cases show the need to make up for past allegiances to the German occupying power. The theories of Zygmunt Bauman on the strength of bureaucratic mechanisms and Piotr Sztompka on moral disorientation are useful for interpreting people’s behaviour in the kinds of conditions Estonia faced in the early Soviet period, whereas theories emphasising ideological motives are less applicable.

The Soviet and the Nazi regime both used their position to give benefits to sympathisers while simultaneously punishing those they saw as their antagonists. What came first, the sympathies or the benefits? Resistance and punishments worked in the same way. Resistance could have been motivated by ideology and be the cause for punishment, but people without decided views could also be punished or impacted through the loss of family, relatives and friends, and thereby driven to active resistance. It is difficult to use ideological expressions employed by the rural population analysing what happened in situations where ideology conditioned the granting of favours and punishments, life and death. Even if the personal motives of actors cannot be determined with certainty, the pressures on them from their immediate superiors, the Communist Party and the purges following German occupation are clear in the source material. The dual power evoked by Stephen Kotkin, and geopolitical aspects seem to be important tools for understanding the situation in post-war Soviet Estonia.

The logic of war seems to have had a great impact on terror in 1949. Often the crucial argument against the kulaks was that they had collaborated with the enemy and in various ways helped them. It is striking that the definition of this collaboration as well as economic exploitation of wage labour, was exceedingly broad. The deeds of

fathers, sons, siblings and in-laws during the war could at any time be used against an individual person. There was one formal exception: women could distance themselves from their husbands by presenting proof of divorce. Several women in the files did this very thing, but it is obvious that the divorce documents did not end up securing their acquittal. Collective guilt, mediated through kinship, was extensive. A corresponding frame of mind was used when power-holders and party members were “exposed”, having relatives who had some relation to the enemy. Only one fifth of the accusations did not make reference to events during the German occupation in the documents. This motive was more one of revenge against the former enemy than it was an ideological stance.

The war had ended, and collaborators in the west were also tried, punished and stigmatised. Still, the Soviet system reacted with a violence that exceeded that of other European countries. Besides those who were arrested or immediately executed, the families of collaborators with the Germans were punished by reduction of their farms if they were peasants. Even more important, however, was the social stigmatisation and systematic exclusion to which they were subjected. Enemies of the people and kulaks were not only categories from which followed punishment and persecution—they were labels that followed family members throughout their lives, determining their possibilities for employment and study. They would of course react to this, so when the family members of victims who had been persecuted earlier by Soviet power were regarded as enemies of the system, this would hold a grain of truth. Considering the treatment they had been submitted to, anything else would have been remarkable. The need to get rid of enemies that had been made through the violent settlement of scores after the war helps us understand why the central authorities chose to attack four years after the end of the Second World War. The external threats were gone, but new enemies had been created through the first settling of scores during the war. The pattern was one of recurring terror and it struck the same families repeatedly.

Specifically Soviet characteristics of violence were to some extent influenced by the utopian ideals for which Soviet society was expected to strive. There was the usual top-down violence motivated by reasons of state, and privileges for those in power to interpret the imperatives of the state—these exist in every undemocratic society. Soviet

violence had an additional feature in the implementation of the campaign of class struggle. This campaign had a troubling way of using peer violence, a kind of egalitarianism in the use of violence. Not only leaders and secret police were endowed with special powers over the victims—these were also given to neighbours, workmates, equals. The fear felt by the population in this period of terror could thus have a double edge. There was the obvious fear of becoming a victim. But there was another kind of fear, which emerged when one was assigned the task of reporting on others, of participating in the destruction of other people's lives. This specifically Soviet feature of the anti-kulak campaign was more destructive to civil society than anything else. Trust was efficiently erased, cohesion disappeared and there was no one to turn to. The "us" and "them" of divided societies did not apply in Soviet society, as everyone was a potential enemy. This kind of violence included social exclusion, political persecution and economic destruction, though there was a limit to physical violence, probably due to general social taboos. Physical violence was still used in confined spaces, by special personnel. The specific Soviet kind of violence was more widespread, but still had thresholds. People were excluded, sent into exile, given long prison sentences that kept them out of sight. Yet these forms of violence were deadly nevertheless, as those deported often faced impossible living conditions. While ordinary people taking part in the process often did not have to see its full consequences, rumours circulated efficiently, and the impact of peer repression penetrated deep into the rural society.

Appendix I

Kulak Families in the 1939 Agrarian Census

There are no statistics from the period of the war and immediately after the war, which means we can only get numerical information about kulak families from the 1939 agrarian census. This is however relevant, since kulak declarations normally referred to the situation of the families before the Soviet land reform. In the Estonian countryside, the most important social division was between the *vanatalud*, the old farms that were bought in 1860–1914 as freeholds, and the land reform farms of 1919–1925, which were smaller and less prosperous. The pre-conditions of agriculture were good in Viljandimaa, and farmers could make money selling flax to itinerant buyers in the late 19th century. The ratio of old farms was high on the site of this local study. The old farmers were considered the backbone of the conservative Agrarian party, while the farmers of the “bourgeois” land reform had their own political party with a more liberal orientation. Old Viljandimaa farmers would thus be the local target of the Soviet *class struggle*, even if differences between the groups were quite small on an international scale. There were no manors and few landless peasants, they belonged to the same social group of family farmers. What was the position of kulak families in this modest social variation? That is what the agrarian census can show.

The official kulak register created in the Estonian Soviet Republic according to the decree of 30 August 1947 is the point of departure. Kulak declarations were made until the death of Stalin in 1953, most

intensively from autumn 1947 up to March 1949, when many of the kulak families were deported. There are 213 kulak families on the lists from the three townships under investigation, 55 in the Northern township, 100 in the Eastern and 58 in the Southern township.

I looked up these families in the primary material for the 1939 Agricultural Census. It was the third census in Estonia, the previous ones had been conducted in 1925 and 1929. The enquetes covered four pages per farm household, and local officials helped households to answer it in June, 1939. The material gives a picture of the social and economic situation of the household, and can be compared to other households in the same township, county or Estonia as a whole.

Using the Data Ten Years After

157 farm families of the 213 kulak families in 1949, or 74 per cent could be identified in the 1939 census. Table I:1 shows the share of identification in each township.

Table I:1. Kulak households identified or missing in 1939

<i>Township</i>	<i>kulak total</i>	<i>found -39</i>	<i>missing</i>	<i>% missing</i>
Southern	58	51	7	12
Northern	55	36	19	35
Eastern	100	70	30	30
Total	213	157	56	26

Sources: Kulak files in Viljandimaa, VilMA f 599, n1, enquetes of the 1939 agrarian census in Viljandimaa.

The ten years between the census enquetes and the kulak files of 1947–49 were eventful. There could be many reasons why households of 1939 could not be found in 1949. Arrests, deportations and shootings, flight and war casualties were among them. If the farm had been taken over by biological children, the household could be traced, provided the children had the same family name. But if the farm was managed by a son-in-law, it was not possible to identify him as family. In the reigning chaos, entirely unknown people could take hold of

farms. It was not uncommon, moreover, that people changed their surname to escape guilt by association.

The unidentified farms were different from the identified in that the families were more mobile. The “mobility” in these cases often had political reasons, and often were families close to the independent Estonian regime, the German occupation power or the Soviet power of the first year. This is practically the only thing that can be said with some certainty about the missing farms, and so the character of the bias is largely unknown. The census was concerned with those who actually farmed the place—besides, farming families could own land that they farmed out, but that was only noted as part of their income.

The Size of Kulak Farms

The size of kulak farms is compared to farm sizes generally in Viljandimaa county. Identified kulak farms in the census have in this case been completed with data from kulak files in 1947–49. In every kulak file, the former size of the holding had been pencilled in. Comparing these data to the census data of identified farms, they proved to be accurate. This is another example of how Soviet power used archival data. These data emanated from the 1944–45 land reform, immediately after the war. A few kulak farms were actually created in the 1944–45 land reform, but these were exceptions. In table I:2, the data used are from the 1939 census when available, if not they are from the kulak files, since the controllable accuracy was high.

Table I:2. Farm sizes, kulak farms compared to Viljandimaa 1939 in general

<i>Size</i>	<i>Kulaks %</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Viljandimaa %</i>	<i>No</i>
< 30 ha	8	16	68	7,593
30–50 ha	29	55	19	2,164
50 < ha	63	120	13	1,434
Total	100	191	100	11,191

Sources: Kulak files, Viljandimaa, VilMA F 599, or 1; 1939 Agrarian Census, Table I, Tallinn 1939.

The table shows that kulak families were chosen among farm owners with relatively large holdings. In the county, most farms owned less than 30 hectares of land, their share of the kulaks was however small. The few smaller farms in the kulak population often had some side occupations like mills, threshers or other machinery that other peasants could hire from them. In some cases owners of a small farm could have income from renting out the land. Generally the kulaks were chosen among the owners of large farms, the larger the farm, higher the share of kulak declarations.

Some kulak families were added to the lists after the deportations of March 1949. They were “unmasked” in the general purge that followed the party purge of the ECP in 1950. Locally, these kulaks were used to explain low production in the kolkhozes—results were bad because kulaks had “slipped into” the kolkhozes. 16 such cases were found in the agrarian census of 1939, and they adhere to the general characteristics of the kulak group. Most of them had owned farms extending over 50 hectares or more during the period of Estonian independence.

From the Eastern Township, 20 kulak families were left in the register although they had been freed in the “kulak court”. They differed from other kulak families in that they generally had smaller farms. Otherwise the covariation seems clear. Two thirds of the kulaks belonged to the group that had the largest farms in Viljandimaa in 1939, the remaining third had middlesized farms of 30–50 hectares. Were there differences between the size of kulak farms between the townships?

*Table I:3 Share of kulak family farms in 1939
in three townships, per cent*

<i>Size</i>	<i>Southern</i>	<i>Northern</i>	<i>Eastern</i>
> 29 ha	10	8	8
30-49 ha	8	27	37
50-< ha	82	65	55

Sources: Kulak files, VilMA f 599, n 1, Enquetes, 1939 Agrarian census.

A difference is discernible as the Southern township had chosen kulak families among the largest farm owners, who owned over 50 hect-

ares in 1939. In particular the Eastern township had chosen more kulak families among the middlesized farm owners, but the Northern Township was quite close. This would mean that the kulak declarations of the Southern Township might have been a trifle more predictable.

Even if kulak families as a rule had owned large farms, not all of them were considered kulaks.

Table I:4. Share of kulak families owning different farm sizes in 1939, three townships

<i>Size</i>	<i>Number of kulaks</i>	<i>Number of farms</i>	<i>Per cent kulaks</i>
30–50 ha	55	245	22
50 < ha	120	221	54

Sources: See table I:2.

About half of the owners of large farms were declared kulaks, whereas the same fate happened to one fifth of the middle-sized farm owners. This also means that almost half of the former owners of large farms and four fifths of the middlesized ones escaped kulak status. Even if we supposed that all the farms not found in 1939 would be of the largest size, the share of kulaks in that group would increase to 64 per cent at most. There would still be a sizeable group of owners of larger farms who were not declared kulaks. In the Southern township, less than half of the large farm families were declared kulaks, while in the Northern and Eastern township the share was somewhat over half.

Summing up, the investigation of farm sizes shows that kulak families as a rule owned larger farms than average. Almost 50 per cent of those owning farms over 50 hectares in 1939 were later declared kulaks. That still leaves almost half of the families owning larger farms outside the kulak group, while a group of farmers owning smaller farms were declared kulaks. Land ownership was not part of the official kulak criteria, but it obviously had an impact on the choice. The difference between townships were considerable. It was more dangerous to live in the Northern and Eastern township than in the Southern, since the hunt for kulaks was more intense there. The shares of both large farm owners and middle-sized farm owners on the kulak lists was larger than in the Southern township. Of these, some escaped deportation, but their life in Estonia was marked by their kulak status, they had to live as outcasts.

Herd Size

The number of cattle was important, since dairy farms were commercial and exported products during the interwar period. The modern farms, members of cooperatives and having a large part of their income from the market, indicated capitalist relations. The number of cattle in the 1939 Agrarian Census was included in my study.

Table I:5. The number of cattle on kulak farms, and the Viljandimaa average in 1939

<i>Farms owning</i>	<i>No. of kulak farms</i>	<i>Kulaks per cent</i>	<i>Viljandimaa No. of farms</i>	<i>Viljandimaa per cent</i>
-5 cows	24	16	7,507	67
6-10 cows	91	62	3,051	27
11+ cows	32	22	633	6

Source: Table VII-a 1939 a, 1939 Agrarian Census, kulaks according to farm enquetes.

There were farms without cattle, in Viljandimaa county numbering 3,700, or roughly one third. Among the investigated kulak farms the share without cattle was two per cent, thus much lower. In Viljandi county, two thirds of the farms owned five or fewer cows. Among the kulak families, only 16 per cent had such small herds. Kulak families thus were not only large landowners, they also owned larger herds than average. 84 per cent of them were dairy farms and belonged to the modern, commercial sector. In the studied three townships, farms owning herds of six cows or more numbered altogether 474, of these 123 were declared kulak, the rest escaped the lists.

The difference between townships corresponds to earlier results. In the Southern township the kulaks are mostly chosen among people with large cattle herds, those who had smaller herds 6-10 cows, one out of four were declared kulaks. In the Northern township one third of peasants owning more than six cows in 1939 were declared kulaks. In the Eastern township almost half of the families owning more than six cows in 1939 ended up on the kulak lists. This shows how high the risks were; in the Southern township those owning large

herds ran the highest risk, whereas in the Northern and Eastern townships families owning smaller herds ran a higher risk of being pointed out. Those who were uncertain belonged mostly to the groups with smaller herds.

Wage Work

Exploitation through wage labour was central for the concept of kulaks. The number of wage workers in kulak families in the three townships is compared to the occurrence of wage work in the country as a whole in 1939. Farm hands were not very frequent, only one farm out of ten had a regular farmhand or a female worker been employed to take care of the cattle and the milk. One farm out of five used occasional wage labourers in the summer. Some farms had both kinds of wage labour, which makes these numbers a little exaggerated. Among the kulak families in my investigation, however, one farm out of three used regular farmhands, and two out of three used occasional labour.

Table I:6. Regular and occasional wage labour in Viljandimaa county and the studied kulaks in 1939

	<i>No. of farms</i>	<i>No. using reg. labour</i>	<i>Per cent with reg. labour</i>	<i>No. using occ. labour</i>	<i>Per cent with occ. labour</i>
Viljandimaa	11,191	1,450	13	2,138	19
Kulak farms	147	58	39	95	65

Source: 1939 Agrarian census, Table II, and enquetes in 3 townships.

The kulak farms thus used considerably more wage labour than the average farm in Viljandimaa. The majority of them belonged to the top layer of farms in the county.

The differences between townships are also confirmed in this respect. The Southern township most consistently chose kulaks who had been prosperous in the past, both as land owners, dairy farmers and as employers on the rural labour market. In the Eastern and Northern townships the choices were not as consistent, and middle sized farm families were chosen to a higher extent.

Appendix II

Family Structures

Kulak households were, according to Soviet propaganda, strong and exploited the weak and poor of the countryside. However, numerous witness accounts asserted that on the contrary, the deported families consisted of elderly people, women and children. A survey of the three townships in Viljandimaa confirms this impression.

Table II:1. Age distribution, kulak households

<i>Sex and age</i>	<i>Southern township</i>	<i>Northern township</i>	<i>Eastern township</i>	<i>Per cent of total</i>
Men –49*	5	8	14	5
Men 50–64	24	10	21	10
Men 65+	15	18	26	11
Women –49*	20	15	37	13
Women 50–65	28	24	39	17
Women 65+	6	7	22	7
Children 0–7	10	8	17	7
Children 7–15	22	21	24	13
Children 15+*	30	18	45	17
Total	160	129	245	100

Source: Kulak files, VilMA, F. 599 Op.2.

*The boundary between children and grown-up people has been drawn according to their position in the household rather than age. Children living with their parents could sometimes be older than newly-wed couples.

The structure of kulak families differs somewhat between the three townships. The Southern township had a higher proportion of complete families, particularly in the age group 50–65 years. The Eastern township chose a higher proportion of elderly couples and households led by single women. The processes of selecting kulaks were different—more of class and political considerations were at play in the Southern township. In the Eastern township the emphasis seemed to be on listing as many families as possible. The simplest way was to accuse anyone using labour outside of the family, wage workers, day labourers or POWs. Families lacking able-bodied men would need such help more than others.

A vivid illustration of the difference between expectations and reality can be found in one of the life stories published in Estonia. A kolkhoz leader in Siberia had been asking for additional labour power. This had been promised him before spring sowing in 1949, and he was eagerly waiting for the wagonloads coming from the new territories of the Soviet Union. He was extremely disappointed as the wagons of “kulaks” were unloaded and out stepped women, children, elderly people. That was not the labour power expected, and moreover, they were weakened and exhausted by the hard and often long journey.

A Statistical Control Group

A statement about proportions of sex and age groups presupposes a normal distribution as a backdrop. As censuses and other population statistics are lacking in Estonia between 1939 and 1956, such data are not readily available. A lower average proportion of grown-up men under 50, could for instance be expected, considering the war history and the many rounds of mobilisation of Estonian men. In order to have some kind of control group, I used kolkhoz families, available in the household books of kolkhozes in the three townships in autumn 1949. 140 families in each township were counted, in the order they appeared in the household books, which are not ordered according to family structure.

Table II:2. Age distribution, kolkhoz families

	<i>Southern township</i>	<i>Northern township</i>	<i>Eastern township</i>	<i>Per cent of total</i>
Men -49*	47	56	36	13
Men 50-64	35	24	58	11
Men 65+	24	12	26	6
Women -49*	86	78	57	20
Women 50-65	20	32	55	10
Women 65+	19	13	26	5
Children 0-7	46	48	39	12
Children 7-15	59	42	44	13
Children 15+*	44	25	46	10
Total	380	330	387	100

Household books of kolkhozes: F. 252, op. 1-M, vol. 36-44, F. 520, op. 1-M, vol. 17-21, F. 508, op. 1-M, vol. 42-48.

*The boundary between children and grown-up people has been drawn according to their position in the household rather than age. Children living with their parents could sometimes be older than newly-wed couples.

There were more women than men under 50 years in both groups, but the proportion of younger men was much lower in the kulak families, 5 per cent compared to 13 per cent among the kolkhoz families. The same difference is evident, but smaller, when women in the same age group are concerned. Inversely, the proportion of elderly people, in particular those over 65 years of age, was higher in the kulak group than among the kolkhoz families.

The kulak households in these three townships thus were significantly weaker in terms of labour power than families who joined the kolkhozes. Kulak families however had a higher proportion of children over 15 years, due to older parents. These young people were probably very useful in agricultural work, both in Estonia and the special settlements in Siberia.

Table II:3. Kulak and kolkhoz households compared

	<i>Kulak h. Per cent</i>	<i>Kolkhoz h. Per cent</i>
Men -49	5	13
Men 50-64	10	11
Men 65+	11	6
Women -49	13	20
Women 50-64	17	10
Women 65+	7	5
Children 0-7	7	12
Children 7-14	13	13
Children 15+	17	10
Total	100	100

Source: Kulak households Table II:1 above, kolkhoz households Table II:2 above.

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Köll's study is a significant leap forward in understanding postwar Baltic history. While up to today the ordinary participators in terror have either been seen as ideologically driven traitors or as mere objects of the communist leadership, Köll presents them as subjects in their own right. Thanks to this effort, history of Stalinist terror in the Baltic States can finally be related to other new explorations on local participation in state violence in twentieth-century Europe.

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